JOHN F. AUTRY

THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

THE PREACHER'S COMPLETE HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN

WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES
INDEXES, ETC., ETC.

By VARIOUS AUTHORS

In Twenty-One Volumes

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
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A HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE BOOK OF

ECCLESIASTES

WITH CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

BY THE
REV. THOMAS H. LEALE

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HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

ECCLESIASTES.

Introduction and Preface.

Ecclesiastes is the Greek name given to this Book by the **Seventy**, as the interpretation of the title *Koheleth*, which it bears in the Hebrew Canon. The meaning of this designation is, on the whole, well represented by the equivalent term, "The Preacher," which our Translators have supplied. The Authorship is generally ascribed to Solomon. But the adventurous spirit of modern criticism has sought for reasons of dissent from this view. These are founded chiefly upon some peculiarities in the Author's language—such as the employment of so many Aramaic words—and upon its representation of Jewish national life, which, it is alleged, is not a fitting description of the joyous times of Israel's most prosperous and magnificent king. It is, therefore, suggested that the Book was written by some Jew of a later age, who, in order to invest it with importance, assumed the name and style of Solomon. But such literary expedients, though employed by other nations, were not the usual practice of the Jews, and whenever resorted to, were discouraged. To us, the excess of evidence weighs in favour of the view that Solomon was the writer. The Jews have always regarded this Book as his production, as such it was received by the early Christians, nor did any one dispute this opinion before Grotius. In the Superscription "The Preacher" proclaims who he is, and the illustrations, evidently drawn from scenes of life in which he was the chief actor, correspond with all that we know of the manner of his life. His restless activity in building and planting, his severe strictures upon women, his unwearied pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, and his endeavours to instruct the Church by means of short and pointed sayings, clearly identify the writer with Solomon. This Book bears internal evidence that it was written after his repentance. Such a nature as his would fall an easy prey to the seductive influence of the talents and riches of other nations. Solomon imitated their splendour, adopted their social customs, and even their idolatrous rites; or—as we think more strictly—became indifferent, regarding all religion as equally true. We have here the history of the struggles of his soul through perplexity, doubt, and trial, till he found true peace

at last in the ways of duty, quiet submission to the Divine will, and in waiting for the Judgment, wherein Eternal Justice will be asserted. The record of the closing years of Solomon's life is not assuring. But when 600 years had passed away, and history could calmly survey his life without the prejudice and complication of near events, Nehemiah speaks of him as of one who was safe in the infinite charity of his God. Chiding his people for seeking alliances with heathen nations, he asks, "Did not Solomon, King of Israel, sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God" (Neh. xiii. 26). The prophecy uttered by Nathan before his birth gives strength to this pleasing hope—"I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men. But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul" (2 Sam. vii. 14, 15). All carelessness in the voyage of life does not end in complete wreck.

"For I have seen a ship in haven fall,
After the storm had broke both mast and shroud."

The great lessons of this book are obvious—The insufficiency of earthly things to confer solid happiness. Riches, talent, and genius, cannot put us in possession of the Supreme good. We are to enjoy the bounties of Providence with thankfulness; and though it be difficult to preserve a calm mind in the present disjointed condition of the world, we must patiently submit to the fixed order of things, and wait for the end. We are to serve God from our youth, and be guided in our opinions and conduct by "the words of the wise"—*i.e.*, by the inspired writers. The chief difficulty is to reconcile some statements in this Book with the teaching of Scripture, and indeed with itself. Thus, the immortality of the spirit of man is both asserted and denied. The righteous and the wicked are represented as sharing an equal fate, and yet as having different portions in the Judgment. Some of these conflicting statements can be brought into harmony by supposing that the Author changes his point of observation. As seen by man, wisdom, goodness, and all our glory end with the grave. But, observed from the standpoint of the Divine idea and purpose, man has a nobler destiny. Some expositors say, that here we are taught the vanity of all things apart from Godliness, and, on this principle, regard each separate statement as true. Others represent it as a discussion between Solomon and several opponents. But, in our judgment, the plan and structure of this Book are most clearly seen if we consider it as a dramatic biography, where Solomon depicts in fervid words the scenes of his own life; and is, for the time, what he describes. He is sceptic, voluptuary, and philosopher by turns. He indulges his capricious temper in the most diverse ways, as if he quitted every entertainment upon the first sensations of disgust. All these were but different experiences of the same mind—human life as observed in the changing moods of a soul of intense feeling and power. A book constructed on this principle must contain some statements not true in themselves, and at

variance with its main conclusion. In the relation of his experience and long observation, the writer shows a power for deep reflection upon the saddest truths of life, and the solemn mysteries by which we are bounded on every side. It is eminently a book for practical men; teaching how to use life wisely and well. In a sacred writer, whose chief theme is the miseries of human life, and the evil and folly of sin, we naturally look for some reference to Christ, the fount of consolation; and to the glory of that world where the sufferings of the righteous will be swallowed up in a sea of infinite pleasure. But we have to keep in mind that the Scriptures are not a collection of detached parts, having no relations of dependence; but an organic whole, consisting of different members. We cannot therefore expect to find the same things everywhere; for the higher the organism, the less we have of the repetition of parts; as we see by a comparison of vegetable and animal structures. The Bible does not increase by deposit—one layer mechanically placed upon another—but it is unfolded as a principle of life by an inner law of organic growth. Resignation is the chief remedy here proposed to relieve the distress of contemplation, or the present disorder. And do not the writers of an advanced revelation exhort us to walk by faith, and not by what is seen? The Gospel itself does not completely dispel the darkness which surrounds us here, and we must await the solution of all painful mystery in the disclosures of eternity. In the meantime, only the mind in harmony with the Divine mind can have true peace, and enjoy the Supreme good.

In accordance with these views of the inspired writer's plan and purpose, we have given our interpretation in a style adapted to homiletics. We have aimed to be brief and suggestive, to trace the principal lines of thought, leaving to others the last strokes and finishing touches. We have consulted the best expositors, and by illustrations and extracts from many able writers, have endeavoured to make this work answerable to its design.

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. The Preacher.**] The word properly signifies "The Assembler." Solomon collected the people together for the purpose of addressing them as a public speaker. A difficulty has been felt in applying this term to him, because in Hebrew this word has a feminine form; but we may regard Solomon as an impersonation of Wisdom, the word for which in Hebrew is also feminine. **2. Vanity.**] The Hebrew word is Hebel (Abel) the name given to one of the sons of Adam. The subjection of the whole creation to vanity was soon observed and felt **5. And hasteth.**] The verb signifies to hanker after, to be eager for. There is a joyous eagerness appearing in the daily course of the sun. The expression corresponds to Psa. xix. 5: "He *rejoiceth* as a strong man (a hero) to run a race." **13. To seek and search out.**] In the sense of to try, or thoroughly to test. The Preacher sought that knowledge which is attained by investigation, as distinguished from that which is arrived at by preconceived opinion, or taken upon trust. **By Wisdom.**] In the Book of Proverbs, this word is equivalent to piety; but in Ecclesiastes it signifies science or sagacity. **15. Made straight.**] The exact force of the Hebrew verb is to come into position. The meaning is, there is a seeming imperfection in the world; man cannot bend the stubborn system of things to what he regards as his own idea of the best. **17. To know madness and folly.**] His aim was to discover the worth of wisdom by its deviation from folly. For this purpose it was necessary to have a knowledge of both. Hieronymus says, *contrariis contraria intelliguntur*, opposite things are understood by opposite.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verse 1.

THE NECESSARY QUALITIES OF THE TRUE PREACHER.

I. He has the True Public Spirit. Solomon gave his invitation to all, as in Prov.: "Unto you, O men, I call." The words of the Sacred writer of Israel have a popular character, as distinguished from the writings of heathen nations, which were addressed only to minds capable of lofty speculation. The wisdom of the world despises and spurns away the ignorant. It is addressed to classes—the heritage of the favoured few. But, the true preacher is a public benefactor in the widest sense. He who seeks the highest and most lasting good for man is the genuine lover of the race. His benevolent designs are not circumscribed by sect, country, social position, or mental culture—they are wide as the wants of the soul, which are seen beneath all appearances and disguises. 1. *This public spirit is opposed to all selfish ends.* The true preacher does not seek wealth—his own glory—has no desire of display. His aim is to proclaim the only remedy for the world's disease. He is lost in the supreme glory of his theme. 2. *It is opposed to all lesser forms of benevolence.* Solomon had acquired skill to increase the nation's wealth, to adorn and beautify cities, palaces, etc. Yet he does not exhort men to attain this power, but rather to seek the Chief Good. The work of the true preacher promotes man's temporal welfare, sharpens the spur of progress, spreads civilization, purifies and elevates literature. The collateral effects of Christianity are not to be despised. But the great end of the preacher is to convey lasting *spiritual* good. The good, of which he is the channel, has the stamp of immortality. **II. He has the impulse to utter the Great Verities of Religion.** Solomon could not keep his knowledge of Divine truth and fervour of piety in the seclusion of his own mind and heart. He must let it forth for the good of all. The true preacher has an irresistible impulse to utter the message God has given him. Why? 1. *Because he has true views of man—his position before God, and his destiny.* He has his eye on the four last things. This gives him earnestness, and singleness of purpose. 2. *Because he has a Divine call.* No mere culture or training can fit a man to be a successful messenger of Divine truth. The true preacher is the creation of the grace of God. The Divine fire, hot within him, will be resplendent without. Every true preacher will be both a burning and a shining light. 3. *Because the nature of his message must fill*

him with compassion, and this has the property of loving to spend itself. The messenger of mercy must catch the inspiration of true charity. III. He has a Soul-History. Solomon had an eventful history of spiritual conflict with sin, sorrow, doubt, and disappointment. He had attained to peace through a terrible struggle. Woe to that man who has nothing but an outward history—no stirrings of an inner life. It may not be necessary for the true preacher to fight over again all the soul-battles of Solomon, but he must know what moral conflict is—the crisis of victory must have taken place in his life. Without such a history. 1. *The symbols of Divine truth will be mere words, having no life or spirit.* 2. *His utterance of truth will be only professional.* 3. *He, at best, can only promote the religion of habit, taste, or culture, instead of true spiritual feeling.* IV. He has True Regal Power. Solomon was a Royal Preacher, and every preacher can be royal in his influence over souls. As mental power is superior to physical, so is spiritual to either. The men of literature are monarchs of the empire of mind. But the men who place spiritual principles deep in the heart of humanity have attained the greatest sovereignty beneath the Supreme Majesty. To gain a soul is to enhance the glory of our royal diadem. He who bears witness to the truth is a king. To possess Divine wisdom, and the power to utter it, invests a man with true kinghood. The Apostles still rule the Church by their words.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSE.

Verse 1. The methods God employs in the conveyance of His truth to man are not peculiar to religion. Men seek by spoken and written words to impress their thoughts on other minds. All who would affect public assemblies by speech must use the expedient of preaching. The great masters of knowledge, in every age, were, in their several ways, preachers.

Solomon was the inspired teacher of the people. His words of wisdom were not only uttered by the voice, but they were also made permanent in sacred literature, and so their influence is perpetual. But though the Christian preacher may not commit his words to the immortal custody of the press, they are engraven on human minds and hearts. That which is written on the soul lasts longer than inscriptions on brass or marble, than the still more enduring works of genius, or even than the Bible itself. The writing which God's truth traces upon the spirit of man will outlast all the imperfect appliances of human learning. If a preacher is inspired by the Spirit, he can write books which will furnish the library of heaven.

Words become ennobled when they are used to convey spiritual ideas. The cross was once suggestive of disgrace and contempt; it now brings to our mind the dear remembrance of the deed of infinite love.

The common expressions of our daily life have deep spiritual significations. Hunger, thirst, truth, freedom, life, death—these words, as the preacher uses them, have meanings of sublime importance. The Holy Ghost can turn the common elements of human language into a celestial dialect. There is a better and a more enduring substance in language than the literature of the world can express.

The words of the true preacher. 1. *Instruct.* 2. *Persuade.* 3. *Gain the affections.* 4. *Unite true souls here.* 5. *Prepare souls for the great assembly on high.*

Solomon taught the people knowledge. Paul was "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts xxviii. 31). The preaching that does not teach is worthless.

Talent, logic, learning, words, manner, voice, action, all are required for the perfection of the preacher; but "one thing is necessary,"—an intense perception and appreciation of the end for which he preaches, and that is, to be the minister of some definite spiritual good to those who hear him [*J. H. Newman*].

Words are the garments with which thoughts clothe themselves. The mind cannot rest in what is vague or diffused: it can only apprehend ideas which have a definite expression. This law of our mental constitution makes the superior revelation of the Gospel a necessity. God has given us an expression of Himself. 1. *By the Incarnate Word.* Thought itself is invisible. We cannot follow the silent excursions of another's mind. But speech is thought enbodied. The Invisible God has been manifested forth in His Son—the Divine Word. *Logos* signifies in Greek, both the word which expresses the thought outwardly, and also the inward thought, or the reason itself. The Eternal Word reveals the Eternal Reason. Christ is the power of God, and the Wisdom of God. 2. *By His works.* These are the thoughts of God as manifested by material things. Physical science is but the intelligent reading of those ideas of God which have taken form and shape in the universe of matter. Here are the Divine thoughts on beauty, force, mechanism, and contrivance to compass special ends for the welfare of His great family. Nature is a volume whose meaning is ever unfolding, and enhancing our conceptions of the Infinite Mind. "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." 3. *By the Scriptures.* These are the thoughts of God concerning us men and our salvation. They reveal (1.) *His thoughts on our natural condition.* (2.) *His thoughts on the means of our recovery.* (3.) *His thoughts on the conditions of our welfare in the great future.*

The Church can only be maintained by keeping spiritual thought alive by means of fitting words. The disciples were commanded to "teach all nations."

A king does not lower his dignity by undertaking the office of a preacher. That sacred calling is honourable, because it is occupied with what is of infinite value and importance—the soul of man. The words of secular speakers are only concerned with the fleeting things of time, but the words of the preacher are concerned with man's interest beyond the grave.

The statesman deals with the concerns of empires; but empires, though they flourish through a life of centuries, yet ultimately share in the mortality of their founders. The advocate vindicates the claims of individuals whose earthly existence is still more transient; but to the preacher alone is appropriated the assertion of a subject whose extent is infinite, whose duration is eternal. To him alone it is given to consider man in the one aspect in which he is unchangeably sublime. With every other view of his nature the low and the ludicrous may mingle; for in every other view he is a compound of the wondrous and the worthless; but in the contemplation of a being whose birth is the first hour of an unending existence, no artifice can weaken the impression of awful admiration which is the great element of sublimity [*Archer Butler*].

The Church, by the voice of her teachers, possesses a power to gather men together, and to unite them by the surest bonds. The society thus held together by the ties of a common heritage of truth, experience, and hope, has no elements of decay. Outside the Church, we find disunion and desolation. "We have turned every one to his own way." Men can never be truly united into one family until they bear the same gracious and loving relations to our Heavenly Father. Success in preaching serves to expand the Parental Empire of God.

Christ is the true Solomon—the true collector of assemblies. He said to Jerusalem, "How often would I have *gathered* thee!" He will, in the end, collect all His people into one great assembly, and unfold to them the riches of His mind. He has yet many things to say unto us, but we cannot bear them now.

Human language cannot fully reveal the riches of infinite truth. The substance of Divine truth in the Bible is superior to the forms of language by which it is conveyed. The preacher's

best words fall short of the sublime verities of which they are the vehicle.

The garment of man's speech must be narrower than the body of God's truth, which by one means or another has to be clothed with it [*Trench*].

The preacher should be careful in the choice of words, for their right use and ordering is not merely an accomplishment, but is bound up with the interests of truth itself.

The mixture of those things by speech, which by nature are divided, is the mother of all error [*Hooker*].

The preacher must avoid the danger of accepting the words of religion instead of the things which they represent. There is behind the words a life-giving Spirit, without which they are vain. The advice of Bacon is to the point: *ipsis consuescere rebus—to accustom ourselves to the things themselves.*

The preacher's words are a debt due to the Church.

The sun does not monopolize its beams, and engross its light; but scatters them abroad, gilds the whole world with them. It shines more for others than itself; it is a public light. Look on a fountain; it does not bind its streams, seal up itself, and enclose its waters, but spends itself with a continual bubbling forth. It streams forth in a fluent, liberal, and communicative manner; it is a public spring [*Culverwell*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 2—11.

The Lowest Possible Estimate of Human Life a Result of the Denial of the Soul's Supreme Hope.

Apart from God and immortality, human life, in all its departments and issues, must be regarded as a failure. "All is vanity." We have: I. The failure of all Human Labours. "What profit hath a man of all his labour?" It cannot be denied that work and industry have their uses and rewards—they are necessary to the very existence of society. But they yield no lasting profit for man—they do not put him in possession of the chief good. Why do they fail to secure this result?—1. *Because they do not employ the whole capacity of man.* In many departments of industry, work is but a dull and weary round. The same course of things goes on from day to day, without variation. After the first difficulty of learning his task is over, a man works mechanically. Even in those labours requiring great intellectual skill and culture, some of the higher powers of the soul are left unemployed and unsatisfied. The Reason which apprehends eternal truth, and the Conscience which is sensitive to eternal law, may be dormant in the midst of great mental activity. A man may be engaged in the highest earthly work, and yet the sublimest powers of his nature may lie unused. 2. *They are only accepted as a sad necessity of his position.* Man does not labour because he delights in it; but because he is forced to join in the struggle for subsistence. Human labour is weariness and toil. Even the nobler exertions of the intellect exhaust the powers. The necessity for labour is a bitter draught for man. 3. *They yield no lasting good.* Some kinds of labour are for the supply of necessities, and some for ornaments to beautify and adorn life. The necessities recur again, and a fresh demand is made. The glories of this life soon clog the sense—they cease to please—there is no felt satisfaction. The fairest scenes soon fade and languish in our eye. All earthly pleasures lack the quality of permanence. The darkness of the shadow of death takes the fairest colours out of life. II. The failure of the Individual Life. "One generation passeth away," &c. If we deny man's supreme hope of being with his God for ever, the highest account we can give of life is—that the race is immortal, but the individual perishes. Humanity survives, but the separate souls which have composed it, which have lived and worked here, are gone for ever. They have come from forgetfulness, and sink thither again. The only constant remainders of all this glory and

activity are the earth and man—the type preserved, the individual lost. This rapid extinction of the individual life, as compared with the permanence of the scene on which it is manifested, appears:—1. *From the uses of History.* For what purpose is history, but to give us an account of past generations? It is necessary because they are gone. Their voices are hushed, and their thoughts and deeds can only reach us through literature, which embalms the past. History is written that the deeds of men may not altogether fail of renown. 2. *From our own observation of Human Life.* We see the world around us in fixed and constant outline, and the busy multitudes upon it. But the separate individuals composing these drop away, one by one, out of our sight. "He changes their countenance, and sends them away." Compared with the ever-during world, the life of man here is but a sudden flash in the darkness of eternal night. This is a melancholy view of life. (1.) *It makes the final cause of man's existence an inscrutable mystery.* If this life be all, we ask—why was such a creature made with capacities which the world itself cannot satisfy? Why should man be endowed with marvellous powers which have no room for expansion here? If there be no immortality, surely man was made in vain. (2.) *Abates the value of every fact in the universe.* Our own existence is the fact of the greatest importance to us. What is it to us that even God Himself exists, and that His works will ever furnish a sublime theme for contemplation, if we ourselves sink into eternal oblivion? (3.) *That dead matter has a longer range of existence than human life, is a crushing humiliation for the soul.* III. The failure of Man's Hope of Progress. If God and the prospect of a future life be shut out, all hope for any real progress for the race is but a delusion. 1. *Nature does not indicate such progress.* There is everywhere movement, activity and change; but no tendency of things to a higher state. All move in one regular, unvarying round. There is no onward march to the distant goal of perfection. Thus, water appears as vapour in the clouds, as liquid in the river; then it runs into the sea, and is raised to vapour again. It is driven in this endless round from age to age. The winds are lashed around their fixed circles. Even every separate particle of air performs its little journey, to and fro, by an invariable law. Even where there is apparent progress, there is no real advance. Life itself only passes from growth to decay. 2. *Our experience of Human Life does not indicate it.* The same classes of events constantly recur. History repeats itself. Given the facts of sin—evil propensities, and the forces of temptation, and it is not difficult to predict human conduct. As the underlying facts of depravity are pretty constant, it follows that one age is but the repetition of another. There is nothing absolutely new, even in mental effort. The grandest utterances of genius are but the expression of the inarticulate aspirations, or dumb agonies felt by myriads of minds and hearts long before. 3. *There is no real progress, notwithstanding the activity of human invention and discovery.* The mind of man will exert itself to fight with his hard conditions. But all his power does not avail to rend the iron bonds of his destiny. Thus, progress in medical science may restore health for a time, but cannot finally turn aside the common fate of death. The dominion of man over nature may be enlarged by his inventions, and his enjoyments multiplied; but the sad and severe facts of our existence still remain. Man by his genius has done much to conquer the wild forces of nature, yet by these he is often vanquished. He has assayed to conquer the winds and the ocean, but tempests and shipwrecks remind him that his sovereignty over nature is not complete. No human power or talent can banish the curse, and restore Paradise. IV. The Failure of Man's Hope for Fame. "There is no remembrance of former things," &c. It is natural to cherish a desire to be remembered. We cannot resign ourselves to the thought that our names and deeds shall quickly be lost in forgetfulness. Hence the restless pursuit of fame. But even this poor consolation is denied us. If we have no hope

of living with God hereafter, there is no earthly immortality of any kind for us. 1. *The best men are soon forgotten.* The wise, the good, and the great of past ages pleased and blessed their generation, and lived for awhile in the memory of posterity; but in the course of revolving years, they have entirely faded out of remembrance. No skill or goodness can preserve the majority of mankind from oblivion. 2. *The world's greatest benefactors are unknown.* This is true of the inventors of the most useful arts—of those who have devised principles of action which have changed the currents of a nation's history—their names are unknown. Those are not the greatest names that survive in history. The men whose thoughts were the deep foundations for changes and events are hidden in forgetfulness. Even the names of the authors of several of the sacred books are unknown. 3. *The roll of fame cannot be practically enlarged.* The human memory is not infinite. As new names are added to the roll of fame, other names must vanish from it. We can have no consolation from any hope of fame. Let us seek to be dear to the remembrance of God.

OPPOSITE IDEAS OF LIFE: THE MATERIALISTIC AND THE SPIRITUAL. Eccl. i. 2—11, contrasted with 1 John ii. 17, John i. 51, James i. 25, Heb. xi. 4.

There are two very opposite ideas of human life—Materialism propounds the one, Spiritual Christianity the other. Let us contrast these two ideas. I. The one idea represents life as a transient appearance, the other as a permanent reality. Solomon says, speaking out the philosophy of Materialism, "One generation passeth away," &c. "All is Vanity"—a mere pageant, an empty show. A whole generation is but a troop of pilgrims pursuing their journey from dust to dust. They soon reach their destination and disappear: but the earth, the old road over which they trod their way, "abideth for ever." To-day I walk through the bustling thoroughfare of a commercial city. Merchants, artizans, the rich, the poor, &c., rush by me. Thirty years hence, a greater throng, it may be, will rush through these streets; but they are not the same men, women, boys and girls. In the view of the Materialist—

"Life's but a walking shadow—a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more."

In sublime contrast with this is the teaching of the New Testament: "He that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever." "He that believeth on Me shall never die." It is true that the earth is a thoroughfare for generations; but it is not the *whole* journey of man. All who have ever trod this earth are living, thinking, conscious still. II. The one idea represents life as an Endless Routine, the other as Constant Progress. "The sun also ariseth," &c. Solomon saw the sun, the wind, the rivers moving in an invariable circle, returning ever to the point whence they set out. He compares this to human life—a mere endless routine. It is true that nature moves in a circle—that the motion of all organic life is from dust to dust. This is, says the Materialist, but a figure of man's moral history; there is no progress, it is an eternal round. Place against this the idea of Spiritual Christianity: "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open," &c. Souls do not revolve in such fixed cycles. Their destiny is not to roll, but to rise. The true path of the soul is like Jacob's ladder, "from glory to glory." III. The one idea represents life as Unsatisfying Labourlousness, the other as Blessed Activity. "All things are full of labour." In every part of nature, hard work is going on. It is especially so in human life. There is labour of the brain as well as of the muscle. Materialists say that this labour is necessarily unsatisfying. This is true to him. Labour, if not inspired by the right spirit, fails to yield true satisfaction. On the other hand, Christianity teaches that labour need not be unsatisfying. A good man is "blessed in his deed." Labour inspired with the spirit of love to God will be eversatisfying. IV. The one idea represents life as Doomed to Oblivion, the other as Imperishably Remarkable. "There is no remembrance of former things" &c. Men and their doings are speedily lost in forgetfulness. Time wipes out the names of famous men from the most durable marble—moulders the metal, stone, parchment and paper on which they were inscribed. Such is the gloomy idea of Materialism, and it is partly true. Posterity soon forgets the greatest of its ancestors. Yet they are remembered by their friends, and their God. No soul can be forgotten. The good man "being dead, yet speaketh."

Christianity teaches that man will ever live in the memory of those who love him. The genuine disciple of Christ has his name written in an imperishable book—"the Lamb's Book of Life" [*Homilist*].

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 2. The duty of teaching, in the imperishable pages of Revelation, the emptiness of earthly glory was not laid upon one who had never tasted it, and who would naturally feel a sense of disgust at what he could not reach. It was Israel's most magnificent king, whose name was the equivalent for earthly grandeur and state, who was commissioned to preach this lesson to the Church.

This description cannot be applied to God, for He is self-existent, and of infinite glory; nor can it be applied to the *whole* existence of those who are partakers of the Divine nature. All that is not God—not with Him—not like Him—is vanity.

That the word vanity should most properly describe the state of the world is no reflection on the Creator. Sin has invested the whole scene of man with this terrible property. "The creature was made subject to vanity."

We have two opposite conditions described in the Bible, "God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." "All is vanity." But the fall of man has intervened. The fall of the highest involved a corresponding reduction all along the scale of nature.

The present state of things is not eternal—it is only one of transition. It was not the beginning, and will not be the end of God's ways. The Gospel has for its object the "regeneration" of Society. The second head of humanity will make all things new. Death, the master-stroke and crowning power of vanity, will be destroyed; the children of God will be delivered from the burden and vanity of earthly existence. This is the hope in which we are saved. (Rom. viii. 24.)

We must feel our emptiness before we can partake of the Divine fulness. To dwell in our true home—which is God—is the soul's refuge from the vanity of life.

The soul's true good springs from another order of things than the present. It can only be secured to us by the kingdom of heaven.

A true sense of the vanity of life shows us our need of God and immortality. 1. It saves us from the false pursuit of happiness. 2. It reconciles us to the loss of the world. 3. It teaches us to prepare for a higher destiny. There is a "better and an enduring substance." Men are taught by the vanity of life their need of heaven.

There are different ways of meeting this painful fact of human life:—1. The Stoical. We may harden our hearts, and look down upon the ills of life with the lofty bearing of a severe philosophy. 2. The Epicurean. We may strive to drown all painful feeling in a reckless devotion to pleasure. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." 3. The Christian. He projects the Divine glory within him upon the outward world, and regards this life as but one step in the path of eternal progress.

The thinkers of all ages, whether within or without the area of revealed truth, have felt the present disordered condition of the world. This feeling has sometimes led to atheism, and sometimes to some desperate or vague hope. Lucretius could see no hand of Eternal Wisdom in the plan of creation—nothing but a disordered and confused mixture. Man has always felt that Paradise is not here.

Christ will restore Paradise, and usher in a new creation in which will be nothing vain. He will be mindful of that world where He was entertained so long, and which was the nurse of His humanity.

What the Spirit of God meaneth by vanity, the Spirit of God can best tell us; who doth Himself explain it, when the Prophet Jeremiah acknowledgeth, "Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit" (Jer. xvi. 19). The vanity, then, whereof the preacher speaketh, is the lying promises of contentment which worldly things make, and the no-profit

which is made of them. "Vanity of vanities," that is, the vanity of them is even more than vanity: and as if he would say more, but could not, he saith the same again: and lest he should not have said all, yet he addeth, "All is vanity" [*Jermin*].

This verse, if they who are great in this world were wise, they would write on all their walls and garments, in their common meeting places, in their private houses, on their doors, in their entries, and above all in their consciences, so that they might always see it before their eyes, always consider it in their minds [*St. Chrysostom*]

Verse 3. Human labour has some present profit and advantage, it trains the physical, and intellectual powers, gives sustenance, comfort and adornment of life. It prevents man from being vanquished by the powers of nature. But without a divine principle in the soul, and a high aim, the profit it brings vanishes with the departing breath. It wants the stamps of immortality. Life's labour will not be in vain for those who live for ever in God's sight.

The curse inflicted upon us signifies something more than the necessity for work. It is labour—all that is painful and distressing in work. In the future world, there will be work in the sense of the highest activity; but, "They rest from their *labours*."

If a man has no hope of heaven, where is the profit of all his earthly labour? 1. In any true satisfaction with it. In looking back upon all his labour, a man must discover that it is far from being perfect. He has to lament mistakes, and movements foolish and unprofitable. 2. In true enjoyment. Man, even in the most favourable conditions, has but few days of rapture—painful thought and anxiety damp his pleasures. 3. In the issues of it. When all is done, and he looks into the future, nothing remains but a dreary blank.

He alone has lasting gain who works for a world higher than this.

He who does not find God loses all the labour of his life.

This fruitlessness of man's labour he doth restrict only to things under the sun, that is, of an earthly and temporary concernment, on which man spends his time and pains which should be employed about things above the sun, or of a heavenly and eternal concernment, which are of a higher rise and nature, and so are expressed by "things above." . . . . Nothing can be esteemed the true profit of a man's labour of body and spirit, but that only which will abide, and continue with him; and therefore, his profit cannot in reason be thought to consist in earthly pleasures which are momentary (Job xx. 5), nor in "riches which take wings" (Prov. xxiii. 5), nor in worldly glory which "descends not after him" (Psa. xlix. 17), but is only to be found in fellowship with Christ, which may be in some measure continued with him along the course of his pilgrimage here, and shall never be interrupted hereafter [*Nisbet*].

The sun is the master-workman of the world, labouring continually, and labouring under his great Master, God, to minister unto the inferior creatures of the world, as the Hebrew name of it (Shamesh, *i.e.* to minister or serve), doth notify unto us. Under this master-workman are all other labourers; he calls them up to their labour; he oversees their labour; he appoints unto them their time of ceasing from labour. But although we labour under him, yet unless the end of our labour be for something above him, it will not profit us; unless as he calls us to labour, so we call upon God for a blessing on our labour, we shall have no comfort in it [*Jermin*].

This speech of Solomon's is the speech of every soul, when being spoiled of those things which are here, she goeth to that life which is hoped for [*Gregory Nyssenus*].

Verse 4. Every object in the material world, by its persistence, preaches to us the brevity of our life. We stand upon our own monuments; the earth is the great tomb of man.

Generations entering life bring with

them powers and capabilities; going hence they take away with them character.

How little possession we have of the present world! We cannot carry hence its wealth or glory. But we can bear away the "pearl of great price."

God does not give to man an earthly immortality. The individual man passes away, and the wastes of death are repaired by fresh life. This arrangement serves:—1. To abate human pride. No man can glory, or boast himself against God, when he remembers that he has no power over his own life. 2. To curtail human experience and knowledge. There is not time to learn all the lessons of the ages, and to search out all what could be known here. 3. To cast the soul upon God. He remains when generations pass away.

The whole company of men and women upon the face of the earth are in a continual motion towards death and eternity: whatever they be doing, their course that way is never interrupted. And therefore as every man in particular should look upon himself as being shortly to bid farewell to all his earthly contentments, never to meet with them again, that thereby his heart may be weaned from delighting in them as his portion, that he may be moved to seek after that which will abide with him when he is gone out of the world. He may thus have true comfort, considering that neither his sufferings in the world can be long, nor his combat with his spiritual enemies, nor shall he be long holden from the possession of his blessedness [*Nisbet*].

The earth the Time-Residence of Man. 1. It is ready furnished. God has prepared it by His power and wisdom. The generations of the past have prepared it by their genius and skill. We enter into the heritage of those who have gone before, are rich with the spoils of time. 2. It is a place of moral education. We are here to be trained for a superior life. 3. It may be made the first stage in eternal progress. God always begins with the lower, and imperfect stages—darkness before light,—chaos before order.—"First that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual."

The passing away of generations does not interfere with their relations to God. He is God of nature, but much more of man. He will not suffer His own image to be effaced by death. The generations who pass away still live before Him. Thus the dominion of God over intelligent creatures is ever enlarging.

The earth remains:—1. As the scene of moral trial for successive generations. 2. As the scene of depravity, and of redemptive power. 3. As the scene of restored Paradise.

The melancholy sadness which touches the heart, when reflecting upon the rapid flight of the generations of men, appears in the earlier poetry. Thus Homer:—

> The race of man is like the race of leaves:
> Of leaves, one generation by the wind
> Is scattered on the earth; another soon,
> In spring's luxuriant verdure, bursts to light.
> So with our race; *these flourish, those decay.*
>
> [LORD DERBY'S TRANSLATION.]

Verse 5. The sun cannot break away from the line of his course in the heavens, nor can man by all his boasted skill get rid of his sad inheritance of sin, want, weakness, and death. All human beings are driven through this sad and weary round.

The course of the sun an emblem of human life. 1. The rising sun is an emblem of the freshness and eagerness of youth. The youth is longing to enter into the serious business of life—"Eager to run the race his fathers ran." 2. The sun's course in the heavens is an emblem of the untried day for man. Whether the day will be clear or dark is uncertain. What will he become? is a question we may ask tremblingly of every child. 3. The setting sun is an emblem of the manner of our departure from the world. We may sink down in the terrible gloom of sin, or our evening sky may be pure.

This frailty of man is illustrated by the sun, who keeps a constant, orderly, and swift motion toward the place of

his rising and setting; and he is said to "haste toward" (or "pant after," as the word signifies) the Orient, or place of his rising, because, however, his motion be no less swift toward the Occident, or place of his setting; yet his rising is most desired and remarked by men. But as for man, when he has once gone down to death, he shall rise no more to the enjoyment of his earthly contentments, and therefore these are not to be sought after as his chief happiness [*Nisbet*].

The reign of law is a theme for grateful and admiring contemplation; yet, it must be confessed, that this endless uniformity of nature has a depressing influence on the human heart. Nature preaches no doctrine of a sublime progress—she seems to forbid the soul to rise into a freer element.

Verse 6. The wind appears to be a wild and irregular power, yet it is under the control of law. The most furious storms run their cycles in obedience to the eternal conditions laid upon them by the Creator. So human history may seem to be but a succession of events without order or plan, but there is a Supreme Governor over all.

Our eye cannot trace or follow the wandering courses of the wind,—nor can we trace the ways of God through human history.

We have here the vanity of man compared to the wind; and though that may be conceived to be of all things most vain, most light; yet here man's vanity is shown to be greater. And whereas Job saith, "O, remember that my life is wind"; the Preacher saith, that it is more vain than wind. For though the wind pass on speedily, and pass away quickly, though most inconstantly it pass from place to place, and every way turneth itself, which our translation hath "whirleth about continually," yet it returneth still, and going from the world, it cometh back to the earth again. But it is not so with man; and that which Job speaketh of himself, is true of every man, "when a few years are come, I shall go the way whence I shall not return."—The passing breath of man's life hath no return. But though man being gone from his natural life cannot return, yet being gone from his spiritual life, he may and should return. And like the wind, having wandered here and there, and whirled about continually in the giddy mazes of iniquity, it were good that he would return according to his circuits, and go back to God by the contrary courses of amendment. We are to return:—1. From a foolish mirth. 2. From an unprofitable sadness. 3. From a vain ostentation. 4. From a hidden pride. For these being the vanities of the world, from these we must return in order that we might go to God, and come to happiness [*Jermin*].

Verse 7. The river, as it runs into the sea, is an illustration of human life. It rises in obscurity, and after a longer or shorter course, falls into the great ocean. Some rivers are insignificant, others run through many countries, and give names to towns along their banks. But all have one common destiny. Such is the life of man—obscure in its beginning, of greater or less renown in its progress, and in its close disappearing in the great ocean of eternity.

When a river is kept within its banks, it carries life and fertility far and wide: but when it overflows its banks, spreads destruction. So human life, when it leaves the channels of truth and right, only spreads evil and sorrow.

God preserves the balance of the powers of nature, appointing all things by weight and measure. Shall He not be as careful and exact in His moral government of man?

The rivers run toward the sea, and yet the sea is never full, because the waters are drawn up thence into vapours and clouds to distil down upon the earth, to water it, and fill the rivers again. But as for frail man, he is carried away as with a flood, and never returns again to the enjoyment of his earthly pleasures [*Nisbet*].

Saint Gregory in a moral sense applieth this verse unto preachers, who having studied and meditated of heavenly things, do then send them

forth for the watering of the Lord's fields; and when they have done so, do then return to study and meditation again. Because unless they do this, "an inward ignorance will dry up the outward words of their preaching" [*Jermin*].

Let us comprehend that we can only then be happy and make others happy, when, as nature unconsciously obeys natural laws, we obey with clear consciousness the commands of virtue and the laws of nature for the spirit-world [*Wohlfarth*].

Verse 8. There is no pause in the battle of life. Man must wage a continual warfare against want and death, or else be vanquished.

There is a sense of langaor and weariness in all human effort. Nothing goes on with lively vigour, but everywhere the spur and the whip are required. The earth will not yield her fruit to man with ease and profusion—it must be wrested by hard labour.

Labour is not an unmixed evil. The good Providence of God has mitigated the curse, and made it full of blessing. Labour has stimulated invention, and developed the powers of man. Nature offers opposition to him; hence the plough and the ship. He is born ignorant; hence the school, where he labours to conquer that condition. Labour has served to modify the virulence of depravity. How much worse would human nature be, were the necessity for labour done away with? The bonds of toil have done much to restrain the fierce passions of men.

To the pious soul, labour only tends to sweeten the prospect of heaven. Rest will be delightful after toil.

Language breaks down under the task of representing the greatness and extent of the labours of men. No one mind can understand every department of human industry. Words fail fully to represent the present world—how much more the activity and glory of the invisible kingdom!

The abundance of phenomena which presses on eye, ear, and the remaining senses, is endless; there are always objects which the eye must see, does see, and brings to him who would gladly close his labours [*Hitzig*].

The issues of men's labours are unsatisfactory. When the utmost is done, the eye and ear desire more. The void, produced in the soul by the fall, cannot be filled up by wealth, worldly glory, or even by the superior treasures of the intellect. No mere idea, or vague sense of some mysterious power, but the Living God alone is the satisfying portion. A nature capable of being filled with all the fulness of God must be discontented with any other portion.

The soul's powers of inner vision and hearing are satisfied when God appears.

Such is the curse which the Lord hath put upon all earthly things sought after as man's best portion, that his unsatisfaction after attainment of them is no less than it was in the pursuit; but rather still growing, as thirst doth in some distempered persons, by drinking. Till lost man close with God, reconciling Himself to him in Christ, and hear the joyful sound of His Spirit speaking pardon and peace through the promises, had he never so great plenty of sensible delights (in themselves never so ravishing), this may still be truly said of him, "the eye is not satisfied," &c. [*Nisbet*].

It is a great mercy, always to receive for the supplying of our want, and never to want the need of receiving [*Jermin*].

The immortal essence of the soul can by no means repose in the empty creature; it seeks ever farther, and will ever have more; it is a fire that burns without ceasing, and would gladly seize all things [*Berleb. Bible*].

Verse 9. If we understand these words of the things themselves, and of the works of God, they would not be true. For God is every day doing what is new; but *we* do nothing new, because the old Adam is in all. Our ancestors abused things just as we abuse them. Alexander and Cæsar had the same dis-

position; so had all Kaisars and Kings; so have we. As they could never be satisfied, so never can we; they were wicked; so are we [*Luther*].

The study of history affords no hope that man, by any power of his own, can rise above the vanity of his condition. Human life of to-day contains no element which past generations did not possess—there is nothing fresh. As the old was bad, it is an evil that there is nothing new.

With advanced civilization there is a multiplying of the enjoyments of life, and a refinement of pleasure. But this does not bring us nearer to complete satisfaction—to the chief good. New appliances for comfort only generate new wants, and what was at first a luxury, becomes a necessity. We may add new links to the golden chain of pleasure, but only to increase the power of it to bind us faster.

We cannot be altered from below, but only from above. "Behold I make all things new," is the regenerating word for man. The new creation begins where vanity begun—with man. When he is created anew in Christ, all things will be new.

The delights of novelty are only prepared for man in Christ. He alone can give us material for new songs. Our life here is a weary round—a depressing sameness, but heaven is eternal progression in light and love.

Our longing for something new is a proof that religion is necessary to bring true rest to our soul. Man expresses the voice of nature, which seems to be restless and uneasy in its present bonds, and to yearn for perfection.

Even in the things of the material world which surrounds us, there is an element of life, a yearning of what is bound, which, like that of the Memnon statue, unconsciously sends forth symphony, when the ray touches it from above [*Schubert*].

1. There is no new earthly delight to be found out by men, besides one of these three idols, *pleasure*, *profit*, *and honour*, which the men of this world have always, since the beginning, been worshipping. 2. Nor is any new course to be found out for attaining these, the like whereof for substance, and no less effectual for the end, hath not been essayed before. 3. Nor any new success of these courses to be expected, but the same disappointment and vexation their fathers had found to deter their children from idolatrous courses (Jer. xvi. 19) [*Nisbet*].

In order to the solid satisfaction of man's soul, there must be a newness, either of the kind of the delights which he enjoys, or of the relish and sweetness he finds in them; which is only to be had in things spiritual and heavenly, in fellowship with God, and tasting how gracious He is; which is no less fresh, sweet, and new, even after many tastes of it, than it was at first. Yea, the oftener any taste spiritual comforts, the sweeter and newer they are; but the most desirable of earthly delights, the more they are enjoyed, the more they are loathed. So that they become old in a moment, and sooner than they can be called new [*Nisbet*].

Verse 10. Men suddenly rejoice in some boasted discovery for healing the hurt of humanity. See, this is new! But the old wounds still remain. The true Healer of man is Divine, and comes from above.

Panting after this illusion of novelty is a sign of secret dissatisfaction. It robs us of that quietness which is the only solace of our life.

Politicians trace the evils of society to bad laws, and by reforming legislation endeavour to increase social happiness. But no alteration of outward circumstances can restore the soul to true happiness and peace. When the light of life shines within, all things become transfigured by that light.

To be acquainted with the history of past events, especially that which is recorded in Scripture, is of singular use to the people of God to guard them against offence, fretting, or being discouraged at the apprehended newness of their trials, or temptations; and to draw their hearts from following those sinful courses, which others have in

their experience proved to end in so much vexation. And while we are taken up with any earthly delight as new, we prove ourselves to be unacquainted with things that have been before, and like children brought from the country to some great city, and there ravished with every trifle as new, which experienced persons are not affected with [*Nisbet.*]

Verse 11. The vast mass of human deeds are buried in oblivion. History gives but a scanty outline of what has been. "One Cæsar lives, a thousand are forgot."

Even literature fails to preserve some from forgetfulness and neglect. Libraries are often the cemeteries of departed reputation. The books which are never disturbed in their dusty beds speak eloquently of the failure of many to secure a lasting fame, though they were above the average of humanity.

The world soon forgets even those who have blest it with good words and deeds. Nothing can save us from the fate of oblivion but a place in the infinite memory of God. The good, in whatever world, are in God's sight—ever in His remembrance. "Nevertheless, I am continually with thee."

It is some kind of preservation of things that are not, that they are not forgotten; and because this might seem to mitigate the vanity of worldly things the Preacher showeth that there is "no remembrance" of things, neither of "former things," nor of things present when they shall be gone, neither of things which shall be. So that as Hugo de Sancto Victore speaketh: "Not only their presence by perishing is taken away, but their memory also by oblivion is blotted out. Wherefore let this check the great minds of some, who think to do some great thing by which they will be remembered, and let it make them to seek after righteousness; for it is the memory of the righteous that is blessed" [*Jermin*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. Verses 12—18.

SPECULATIVE WISDOM APPLIED TO THE FACTS OF EXISTENCE.

I. **The exercise of it is Divinely appointed for all.** "God hath given this sore travail to the sons of men." We are not left to choose whether or not we will think upon the mysteries of nature, of human life, and destiny. We are bound to exercise thought and investigation. 1. *By the nature of the powers of the human mind.* We cannot be content with a passive, indifferent gaze upon the world around us, and the scene of man. We are constituted by our Creator speculative beings. In the pauses of the world's labour, a sense of the harmony of nature is forced upon us, we feel ourselves in the presence of some mysterious Power. Man is conscious of wants and cravings which belong not to the body. He has pains and pleasures in which the physical part of his nature does not share. The mind is ever groping for some solvent idea that will adjust the discrepancies that appear in this life. Man cannot rest in merely seeking the satisfaction of his bodily wants, and in studying the system of nature only as it affects these. He must speculate upon nature, himself, society. 2. *By the necessities of our present position.* Man must maintain his sovereignty over nature, must bear undisputed sway over the wildest animals, and win spoils and tribute from the mine, the forest, the ocean, and the air. Without thought and the power of contrivance, he must soon cease to be lord of this lower world; for in all other respects, the brute creation would be his superiors. Man holds his position by the power of reason. He is forced to reflect upon the facts of his mysterious existence, as it touches, at one extremity, all that is vile and base; and on the other, all that is noble and divine. Hence the religious instinct in man, which no culture, or refinement, or boasted supremacy of reason, can ever destroy. 3. *No superiority of outward condition can discharge us from the necessity of this exercise.* "I was king." High social position, and profusion of earthly splendour cannot

shut out thought and reflection on the system of nature, and the painful mystery of life. Pleasure, and a lofty feeling of importance cannot wholly occupy the mind. Pale and anxious thought can break through the charmed circle of kingly dignity. II. The Issues of it are Unsatisfactory. Mere human knowledge and speculation upon the mysteries of life, yield no results of permanent value. 1. *They do not satisfy the intellect.* However wide the empire of science may expand, the mind will pant after the undiscovered regions beyond. The vain pursuit, without the help of revelation, of the ultimate truth concerning nature, man, and God, must ever keep the mind unsatisfied. 2. *They do not satisfy the heart.* The heart has infinite longings beyond the power of expression, and a faculty of vague prophecy of some glory beyond the experience of this life. It cannot be satisfied by human speculation or science; it must meet the loving heart above. It longs to know of a love which is powerful, and a power which is kind. The investigation of matter, force, of the vast machinery of nature, were we conscious of no loving heart above, would be painful. Knowledge and speculation, which must end with death, have poor comfort and hopeless issue. We can have no true consolation unless we feel that there is life above and on before. 3. *They are powerless to improve the condition of which we complain.* The vanity to which creation is subject cannot be removed by our wisdom, ingenuity of contrivance, or of speculation. (1.) *Man cannot alter the system of things in accordance with his own ideal of the best.* "That which is crooked cannot be made straight," *i.e.*, brought into position. In the arrangements of the world there are, apparently, imperfections. We can imagine a kinder, less destructive, and more peaceful system of things. While pain, suffering, death, and decay remain, this life cannot be the ideal best. But we have no power to alter the frame and disposition of nature, nor the hard conditions of our life. There are mysteries, anomalies, and crooked things in human life; but we cannot bring them to an ideal perfection. (2.) *Man cannot supply fatal defects.* "That which is wanting," &c. Mere human wisdom sighs in vain for that which would restore the lost harmonies of creation, but it will not be supplied. The lost and forgotten spell of power is only supplied to the new man in Christ, who lives in a new creation. III. The Divine Purpose in it has a moral significance for Man. "To be exercised therewith." The intention of God hereby is to afflict man's mind, and to humble him. 1. *His pride of power is humbled, so that he might feel his need of redemption.* When a man feels that his own strength is of no avail, then he has a motive for depending on the strength of God. He wants a strong deliverer. The boast of power is but empty and vain when a man feels that there is no one to save him from death. 2. *His vain presumption of wisdom is humbled.* God allows man to try the strength and capacity of his mind in the application of his speculative wisdom to life; gives him difficult problems, as a severe discipline, so that his reason might be humbled. This exercise is a pain and a perplexity. Pain and suffering have a tendency to throw the mind back upon itself, and to force us to seek relief in another. IV. The Difficulty is only increased by Superior Powers of Investigation. "In much wisdom is much grief," &c. An increase of human knowledge and power of speculation does not banish the painful impression the scene of life makes upon the mind. 1. *Some subjects of investigation are painful in themselves.* History is chiefly a record of oppression—wrong—cruelty—war. The history of the conflict of opinion reveals base passions—pride of intellect—great mental labour, ending at last in some pitiful and controverted conclusion. We feel that, after all, human wisdom has done little to settle the great questions—the mystery of life, and the ultimate destiny of man. Even Ecclesiastical History is a fearful record of ambition, strife, and corruption of the truth. The more knowledge of this kind, the more material for melancholy reflection. 2. *The results of our investigations fail to satisfy the whole of our nature.* Science only gives us facts and laws, not a personal God. The study of mankind

intensifies our pity—our suspicion; or awakens envy—aspirations in us that will never be satisfied. Our studies of nature and of man, as far as they are guided by human wisdom alone, only tend to make us sad. They leave the deepest yearnings of the soul unsatisfied—we still cry out for the "Living God." 3. *There is an oppressive sense of imperfection when we have done our best.* The increase of knowledge only convinces us of our hopeless ignorance; the infinite unknown rises up before us to humble our pride. The more deep and extensive our study, the more it is seen how one subject is closely related to another, till we are forced to despair of surveying the whole scene of truth, even from the loftiest elevation of the mind. If there be not an Infinite Intelligence, the whole universe cannot be comprehended by any one mind. The little knowledge, which is all the wisest can attain to, is humbling—a sorrowful portion. 4. *Mere human knowledge, as far as the individual is concerned, is of brief duration.* "Art is long; life is short." If this life be all, our own wisdom must soon perish. Why trouble ourselves, if life is so soon to end for ever, to gather stores of knowledge, only to increase the tenderness of our nature to all painful impression?

"Who would put forth one billow from the shore,
If the great sea be—Death?"

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 12. The Royal Preacher had full opportunity for a practical acquaintance with the theme of his discourse. He tried the world at its best; and if it had any solid joys, he could have discovered them.

High social position, and the activities of public life, are favourable to large and correct views of human things. A practical man is able to form juster views than a recluse. Theories of human nature, shaped by lonely meditation, away from the busy activities and strifes of men, are often dispersed by the stern facts of life. The true instructor of the Church mingles with men.

"In Jerusalem" — the home of Divine Revelation. Solomon had the advantage of studying the inspired records. He possessed a national history in which the hand of God could be plainly traced. He was the representative of God in a political system where Divine laws ruled national life—the first outline of that Kingdom of God which a greater than Solomon came to establish.

The true preacher arises from the midst of the Church. He has Divine facts. He enters into the possession of the rich heritage of the past.

He had not yet put off his royal robes, he had not yet laid aside his crown; and yet, considering the vain uncertainty, and speedy passing away of worldly greatness, he rather affirmeth himself to have been than to be. "I was King" [*Jermin*].

The eminency of a man's place and employment, whether ecclesiastical or civil, as also the dignity and privileges of the people over whom he hath charge, should be so far from making him slack and negligent in pains for bettering his gifts—as if his measure of these were sufficient already, seeing he is so employed—that on the contrary, the consideration thereof should stir him up to the greater pains and diligence, that he may grow in abilities for the more faithful and successful discharge of his employment; for the consideration of Solomon's office in the Church and State of Israel may be looked upon, as here mentioned by him, as a special motive to that exceeding great diligence afterwards described [*Nisbet*].

Verse 13. In all real study, the heart must be engaged as well as the head—there must be desire as well as power.

Love is always ready to explore its object.

We must not be content simply with a knowledge of the facts of human history. We should study the principles underlying them, and their tendencies—their bearing upon the purposes of God here, and hereafter.

The most precious things of truth lie not on the surface, before the careless eye. They are hidden in the depths, and greatly embedded, and can only be gained by laborious toil. The best teachers can but tell us where to dig for the precious ore: the labour which puts us in possession of it must be our own.

God is educating the human race by forcing upon everyone the painful problems of life—by the discipline of sorrow and humility—also, by means of punishment.

Even the inspired teachers of the Church had necessity for laborious study and thought. The Church should value the products of long and careful meditation.

"To search out . . . concerning all things that are done under heaven." This involves—1. The study of moral helplessness. The facts of evil, in human conduct, must be admitted. Unaided by a Divine power, man cannot lift his own burden—he must lie crushed by the load. 2. The study of a severe moral conflict. The grace of God is in the world opposing sin, and modifying the facts of depravity. As a resultant of these forces, this world is neither a Paradise nor a Hell. 3. The study of great possibilities for the future. The consequences of human conduct are projected beyond the world. The great harvests of thought and action only ripen in eternity. Man, in his degradation, still has powers capable of God, and of all the improvements of eternity.

He who came to us from above the sun can alone redeem us from all the evils under it.

There is nothing which God hath made, or doth, neither anything which He ordereth, or permitteth to be done, but it deserveth man's serious thoughts, as that from whence he may learn something for his profit. The study of the creatures will proclaim to him the glorious properties of his Maker. The study of human affairs may teach him what is for the advantage of his worldly estate, yea, even the greatest miscarriages in the world may afford him either matter of caution to beware of the like, or of praise that men are restrained from miscarrying further, or of comfort that God is bringing good out of it. The children of God may lay out their wit sometimes in considering what happiness the creatures and human endeavours about them can yield, still putting the same in the balance with what is to be had in communion with the Lord, so that comparing Christ, the true Apple-tree, with the trees of the wood, "His fruit may be the sweeter to their taste;" and comparing the excellent knowledge of Him with what may be known and enjoyed of other things, these other things may become dross and dung in their esteem [*Nisbet*].

Behold here the royal student, and see the matter, the method, the manner, the diligence of his studying. 1. *The matter* is "all things that are done under heaven," as the ethics of the manners of men, the civil histories of the deeds of men, the natural history of the works of God. 2. *The method* of his study we have, in that it is said, "by wisdom," for that is the only right method of well seeking anything. Method is the wise part of study, but an unwise method is a methodical folly. 3. *The manner* of his studying we have in that "he sought and searched." He sought things unknown, and searched deep things. 4. *The diligence* of his studying we have in that he gave his heart unto it. He went about it not only with a willingness, but with a love which locked him up, and held him hard unto it [*Jermin*].

Verse 14. If men had only disappointment of their hopes to look for, while they neglect the new and living way to felicity, and seek happiness in vain and sinful courses, their misery were the less. But besides this, they shall find the issue of their course to be an eating up and gnawing away of their spirit, and that they have been feeding upon the wind, while delighting in things earthly as their best portion. Such is the signification of the original words "All is Vanity and Vexation" or gnawing away of the spirit, or feeding upon the wind [*Nisbet*].

The most diligent study of human life only reaches the miserable conclusion, that "All is Vanity." Yet, an exercise yielding no satisfactory results in the looked-for direction, may be salutary. God often educates the human race by failure. Amidst the wreck of our earthly hopes, we are ready to grasp the hand stretched out to save, and to draw us to the shores of life.

Worldly things do not feed our souls, but rather the hunger of our souls [*St. Bernard*].

The "Vanity," etc., may be referred unto his seeing and knowing, the knowledge of man being such as is full of vanity and unquietness,—unquiet in the getting; unquiet being gotten, lest forgetfulness should lose it again; and vain where it is greatest, because it is far from the perfect discovery of anything. For this world, and the things in it, are a book of that largeness and greatness, that none is able to read it over [*Jermin*].

Verse 15. Mere earthly wisdom and skill fail to bend the perverse direction of human things into the true position. Sin has produced this deformity. In the world above, there is nothing crooked: all is exact—regular—beautiful.

Men have tried several expedients to lessen the evils of life, and to perfect society,—the dominion of arms—wise government — education — the supremacy of the church—the assertion of the social principle. But none of these can bring about a state of things in which all will go on smoothly. In the best ordered conditions of society, there must be imperfections which man can never remedy. Our only hope for the world is the answer to the prayer, "Thy Kingdom come."

Even when our souls are renewed by grace, the evils of life remain. Grace does not straighten the natural crookedness of things. "The body is dead, because of sin." All the world's glory leads to the grave, and death is the sum of all vanity.

Whatever is wanting to make the world and man perfect, we cannot supply from hence. The true remedy for our fatal defects is not a philosophy, but a revelation.

When the perfect world is displayed to the inner vision, we are reconciled to the irregularites of the present.

With man in this life, the *quid est* is far below the *quid opostet*.

The present state is a discipline in Christian toleration. We must acknowledge imperfection, and be content to endure, and to wait for the glory of the perfect world.

1. Before men get grace to choose Christ for their portion, and so to be made new creatures, there is nothing but crookedness, and contrariety in their nature and actions to what is truly good and right in the sight of God. (1.) Their understanding is crooked, so that it cannot discern things spiritual; and hath upon it strong impressions contrary to the truth. (2.) Their will is crooked in regard of its averseness both from passive and active obedience to their Maker. (3.) Their affections are crooked in so far as they loathe and weary of what God approves and commands. They love and delight in what He abhors; whence it is that every step of their walk is a turning aside to their crooked ways. 2. There are not a few things wanting to fallen man considered in his natural estate. He is spiritually destitute. He wants *life—health—food—raiment*—a sight and feeling of his wants, and the desire to have them supplied. Yea, he wants the art of numbering out his wants to Him that can supply them. 3. The rectifying of this crookedness of man's nature and actions, and the supplying of his spiritual wants, is a work that surpasseth the power of the creatures, and requireth a creating, infinite power for the doing of it. Only the infinite virtue of Christ's death can crucify the old man, and make the sinner a new creature; which is to make straight that which is crooked. Only he whose understanding is infinite, who numbers the stars, and hath in Himself all fulness, knows the number of our wants, and can supply them all [*Nisbet*].

Verse 16. It is salutary, at times, to enter the secret chambers of our own heart, to speak freely there, and thus be our own audience. We should know what lies within ourselves—what is the extent of our power. If we would avoid the ruin of our spiritual fortunes, we must learn to take reckoning with ourselves.

The more we commune with our own hearts, the more cause have we for humility; for the best discover imperfections. Yet, as we discover in ourselves powers and capabilities which make religion possible, this duty should serve to inspire hope. The Divine hand has something to lay hold of in man.

The very names of the early kings, who had been before Solomon in Jerusalem (such as Melchizedek), show that they had higher purposes and aims than the other kings of the earth.

Each one should enlarge his original capacity. The gifts of God must be improved by our own industry, or their energy and value will grow less.

A great estate without wisdom does not add to the true dignity of the owner. Wisdom and knowledge are necessary even to extend the uses of riches, and to increase the enjoyments of life. Riches without culture and study only increase the temptation to coarse pleasures.

The experience of wisdom and knowledge is better than wisdom itself, for the habits and principles acquired by long and careful meditation are of greater value than the mere facts of knowledge.

The treasures of the mind become the more endeared by long possession.

The Lord's people should not satisfy themselves with the simple notional knowledge of the truth, unless they have also the experimental knowledge thereof, which consists in our discerning evidently the things we know in the causes thereof, and by their effects upon ourselves or others. . . . The more outward advantages and accommodations men have for acquiring knowledge, and the greater inward qualifications, the more should their heart be set upon enriching themselves therewith; otherwise the Lord will challenge them sadly for abusing His gifts contrary to the end for which He gave them [*Nisbet*].

Verse 17. To attain a true knowledge of man, it is necessary to study *all* the facts of his nature and condition, and not to make a selection of the most pleasant and favourable. Goodness and truth are not only to be investigated in themselves, but also in their counterparts, evil—error—and confusion.

Man does not originate the objects which his science investigates. The specimens are selected by nature. We must accept the facts of human life, however painful the study of them may be.

The knowledge of the world's madness and folly teaches a man to value true wisdom. The knowledge of disease is necessary to discover the means for the preservation of health.

A close examination of human effort will discover that many actions reputed wise must be charged with folly.

We must study the madness and folly of the world only in order that we might hate and avoid them. Men survey, and lay down in the map, the features of barren and inhospitable countries where they never intend to dwell. They construct charts, which, though they mark the positions of safe anchorage and secure havens, yet, for the most part, indicate the dangers which are to be avoided by the mariner. The rocks and shoals, and sandbanks of life must be studied.

And that he might the better know wisdom, he laboured not only to know it in itself, but to know it also by comparing it with madness and folly, that the foulness of the one might set out the beauty and clearness of the other. And first he sought to know wisdom, that knowing madness and folly, he might as well hate, as know them [*Jermin*].

Astronomers determine the distance of a heavenly body by observing the different directions it bears when viewed from two positions widely apart.

So the observation of man from the extremes of moral conduct (wisdom and folly) is necessary to our complete understanding of his real position in the moral universe.

Verse 18. This is true. 1. Of the knowledge of nature. As we increase our knowledge of the facts and laws of the universe, our ignorance becomes more and more apparent. There is an ever-deepening sense that the mystery of the ultimate facts of nature retires into closer seclusion, and becomes altogether unsearchable by us. As the sphere of light enlarges, so does the circumscribing sphere of darkness. 2. Of our knowledge of mankind. One result of an extensive study of human nature is, that we have less faith in it as we grow older. Our suspicion increases. The sins and follies of men fill the righteous soul with grief. 3. Of the knowledge of ourselves. The study of our own heart and life gives us reasons for humility and grief. The stronger the light by which we observe ourselves, the more will evils and deformities be revealed. 4. Of our knowledge of the Heavenly World. The more we learn of the nature of that world, the more we have reason to blame ourselves that it has so little effect upon us.

The increase of human knowledge renders the soul more sensitive to influences—increases the power of feeling pain and distress — complicates grief.

Wisdom reveals defects, dispels illusions, and destroys the contentment and fancied security of ignorance. The laughter of fools is loud, for wisdom would chastise the fervour of their joy. The failure of our highest faculties to give us true happiness casts us at the feet of God, "in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life."

Every increase of the Godly sorrow of the righteous has comfort in the bosom of it, and always joy at the back of it [*Nisbet*].

All human wisdom labours, and has care and sorrow for its reward; the further wisdom looks, the greater is the labyrinth in which it loses itself. It is with reason as to the eyes with a magnifying glass, when the most delicate skin becomes disgusting, the most luscious dish a mess of worms, and the finest work of art a mere botch. We see the impossibility of removing all inequalities of human society, and we see in it an overwhelming number of faults and failings; yea, the weakness of our senses and judgment leads us to find faults in beauties, because we examine all things only fragmentarily [*Harman*].

In respect of the contemplation of truth, knowledge causeth delight; but in respect of the things known, it causeth sorrow. Now if they be good things which are known, then the sorrow is from the great labour which a man must take to attain the knowledge of them; and from the little perfection of knowledge to which his great pains hath brought him. If they be evil things which are known, then his sorrow is that he is subject to them [*Jerome*].

CHAPTER II.

Critical Notes.—1. I said in mine heart.] The pronoun is emphatic and denotes the importance of the person who is speaking. There are instances of such addresses to the soul in the Psalms. *Enjoy pleasure*, literally "behold good"—linger with it so as to enjoy it. Here is the germ of the parable of the Rich Fool—*Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years.* **3. I sought in mine heart.]** The word has the meaning not of thinking or reflecting, but to prove or assay—to make a moral experiment. **8. The peculiar treasure of Kings.]** The treasure forced from vanquished heathen rulers, and the voluntary gifts of friendly rulers such as the Queen of Sheba. *The delights of the Sons of Men.* An obvious reference to Solomon's excessive animal indulgence. **12. What can the man do that cometh after the King?]** What will my successor do? He will probably, like the rest of the world, follow the well-worn path of sin and folly—*even that which hath been already done*—fulfilled in Rehoboam. **16. And how dieth the wise man? As the fool!]** This is an inexpressible burst of feeling—a deep regret that it should be so. It is a question painfully asked of the Supreme Wisdom, not in anger but in grief. **24. There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink.]** Not in the Epicurean sense, worshipping the triad of sensual life—eat, drink, and be merry; but in the sense of a rational and righteous enjoyment. *In his labour.* Thus it was not the luxurious enjoyment of the idle.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1, 2.

A Wise Man's Trial of Sensual Enjoyments.

We may look upon the troubles and painful mystery of life and be sad; or we may strive to laugh them away. There is a serious, and also a merry mood of treating the dark enigma of our present state. Here we have a wise man making a trial of worldly pleasure, if haply he might find therein relief and satisfaction for his jaded mind. "Therefore enjoy pleasure," look upon and feed thy desire with every sensual enjoyment. Such a course is not true wisdom.

I. It is a dangerous Moral Experiment. Solomon's trial of the resources of human wisdom ended in the grief of failure. Now he plunges into pleasure to determine if *that* will fill his soul, and drown the anxiety of painful thought. But such an experiment is dangerous. 1. *Because there is a secret misgiving as to the success of the result.* "Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth." A word of entreaty is used, as if he said to his heart, "O let me try thee again!" All his real convictions were against the hope of success in this trial. He had to rouse himself up to this endeavour—to press his heart to it, as if it had been too slow in the pursuit. Worldly men feel in their heart of hearts that sensual pleasures do not satisfy—that they leave a sting behind, and fret and wear the mind with long regrets. It is dangerous to submit ourselves to what we must confess, in moments of calm reflection, is a delusion. 2. *The pursuit of pleasure as an end is a forgetfulness of the great work appointed us here.* All pleasure and amusement are not forbidden. But if we make these the end of life, and abandon ourselves to their treacherous illusions, we forget the claims of duty. Whatever lies in the path of the Commandments is ours to enjoy, but we must not stray from that path in search of tempting pleasures. Duty and service claim our first regard. We were not sent into this world by our Maker, like the Leviathan into the sea, merely that we might "play therein." It is dangerous to run the risk of forgetting the claims of duty, and the high destiny of the spiritual part of our nature. 3. *The undue pursuit of pleasure injures every faculty of the soul.* The health of the soul is impaired, and the symmetry of it destroyed, by draining off it vital force in one direction, just as the body is deformed and its strength consumed by malignant tumours. (1.) *The understanding is impaired.* He who is devoted to pleasure has need only of those mental efforts necessary to devise new modes of enjoyment. The higher powers of the mind remain unemployed. He who would reach

intellectual eminence must learn to "scorn delights, and live laborious days." (2.) *The affections are blunted.* The indulgence in worldly pleasures, both coarse and refined, tends to make the life artificial. Beneath apparent gentleness and goodwill, the heart is often hard and cold. The children of soft indulgence can weep over the elegant distress of fiction, but are often unmoved by the real sorrows of life. (3.) *The will is enfeebled.* The seductions of pleasure bring it into captivity. The elastic power of it is injured, as steel springs by long compression. The syrens of pleasure paralyze the will. (4.) *The sensibility of the conscience is injured.* When we are given up to pleasure and forsake duty, the delicacy and tenderness of our conscience are impaired.

II. It is Moral Insanity. "I said of laughter, it is mad." In the wild excitement of pleasure, a man loses his claim to rationality—it is but the infatuation of madness. To forsake duty, and allow the senses to run riot, is to dethrone reason. The symptoms of the mental and moral diseases are similar. 1. *There is delusion.* The insane mind lives in a false and unreal world. The true proportion of things are disturbed. The man of pleasure is not governed by truth and reality: he lives in a delusion. 2. *The supremacy of wild passions.* The insane man is the subject of uncontrollable impulses. Reason being no longer his guide, he is driven about by the storms of passion; and, like a ship without a rudder, has no power of self-direction. He who lives for this world's pleasure alone, give up the high command of himself, and becomes the sport of untamed and destructive passions. The world's loud laughter—which has no reality of deep and abiding joy in it—is but the wild merriment of the maniac. 3. *There is an entire perversion of the faculties.* The will, instinct, and emotions are all perverted in mental disease. The man who forsakes God, and lives for pleasure, uses none of his powers aright. Such a condition is:—(1.) *Pitiable.* We have sympathy with the sick and suffering, but the madman deserves our pity. The votaries of pleasure awake the pity of every righteous soul. (2.) *Beneath the true dignity of man.* When reason deserts her throne, the man falls below his true dignity. His sovereign power is gone, the sceptre is wrested from his hand. The image of God becomes fearfully disguised. So the man of worldly pleasure is a slave in the "far country" of evil, when he might be a ruler at home with his God. (3.) *Remediable.* By judicious treatment, mental disease may be cured. The sobriety of reason may come again to the distracted man. The disorder of the faculties may give place to perfect soundness of mind. So the prodigal, who has rioted in ungodly pleasures, may "come to himself" by coming to his father. The spirit of a "sound mind" is the gift of God. III. It ends with Disgust of its own Device. "Of mirth, what doeth it?" The pleasures of the world promise much, but they deceive at last. He who seeks in this way to drown the sense of the sad facts of life becomes at last disgusted with his own device. He first suspects, and then discovers himself befooled. 1. *He is deceived as to their depth and intensity.* They promise to entrance the soul, and to shut out all painful thought and anxiety. But they cannot accomplish this,—"Even in laughter, the heart is sad." 2. *He is deceived as to their constancy.* They promise to entertain the soul all life's journey through. But they soon clog the senses, and wear out the energy. Even the power of enjoying the world often passes away before the world itself. Pleasure casts her votaries off when they have toyed with her for a season, and the brief delight is turned into loathing and disgust. The soul sorrowfully asks the question which needs and expects no answer.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. The joy of the world is so constituted that it entails repentance, mortification, and grief; but the pleasure that the faithful find in God is spiritual, constant, satisfying, and inexpressible [*Starke*].

It is in vain that reason and conscience point out to us one path when the affections urge us in another. If the heart inclines to worldly pleasures, the mind soon becomes a willing captive.

A man's moral position is determined by what he says in his heart.

The heart must have some object to fasten on; the pleasures of the world, or the joy which God gives.

Language bears witness to the vanity of earthly pleasures. We call them diversions, for they divert the attention from our real miseries. They only serve to make us forget that we are unhappy.

It is dangerous to entice our hearts to such courses as are forbidden by reason and duty. The Children of Israel were warned by the voice of God not to "seek after their own heart and eyes," that is, they must not make any moral experiments.

If we trust to the pleasures of the world, they will serve us like Absalom's mule, and slip from under us when we need them most [*Morning Exercises*].

The Lord hath given this pre-eminence to man above all other creatures in the world, that he can reflect upon his past temper and actions, and commune with his own heart for the future. He should make use of this for restraining himself from sin; for reclaiming himself therefrom when he is fallen into it; for encouraging his heart in duty, especially to trusting in God, and to praise Him. In which, and the like places, are the holy soliloquies of a Christian with himself. When the Lord is provoked to withdraw His gracious presence, man can do nothing but abuse this privilege, to the blowing up of his own corruptions, and encouraging his heart to courses destructive of his own peace and comfort, and which will prove a bitterness to him in the latter end [*Nisbet*].

Verse 2. The laughter of the votaries of pleasure, like that of distracted men, arises from the want of knowing and feeling their true situation—from the want of thought. Calm reflection upon the dark foundations upon which this mysterious life of ours reposes, and the awful truths lying around it, would fill the soul with emotion, and turn the loud rejoicing into the silence of a great sorrow.

In the midst of sinful pleasures, it is well if men have sufficient moral strength remaining to question them, and to suspect their delusive charms.

Worldly mirth ends in vexation, remorse, and disgust; but spiritual joy yields a profit of infinite satisfaction.

In the world, feasting comes first and fasting afterwards; men first glut themselves, and then loathe their excesses; they take their fill of good, and then suffer; they are rich that they may be poor; they laugh that they may weep; they rise that they may fall. But in the Church of God it is reversed; the poor *shall* be rich, the lowly shall be exalted, those that sow in tears shall reap in joy, those that mourn shall be comforted, those that suffer with Christ shall reign with Him [*J. H. Newman*].

Even as Christ went not up to joy, but first He suffered pain. He entered not into His glory before He was crucified. So truly our way to eternal joy is to suffer here with Christ [*Liturgy, Visitation of the sick*].

Mirth effeminateth the virtue of nature, it enfeebleth the strength of the mind, it weakeneth the forces of the soul, it bringeth destruction to reason, it casteth the mist of darkness upon the purity of serene thoughts [*Jermin*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 3—11.

THE WORTH OF THIS WORLD'S PLEASURES FAIRLY TESTED.

The experiment to ascertain whether the pleasures of this life have any abiding value for man, was conducted, in this instance, with perfect fairness. I. It was

tried on a sufficient number and variety of cases. Solomon had ample opportunity of tasting every pleasure the age could afford. He did not, like one from some obscure retreat, despise those glories he could not share. He tried them all. 1. *He tried coarse pleasures.* "I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine." The excessive indulgence of the lower appetites—such as the intoxication of the senses with wine—promises us a brief happiness. We forget the miseries and painful aspects of life, and enjoy a temporary elevation of soul. The feelings become intense, the mind seems half inspired, life appears as if lighted up with a sudden glare. The graces of intellect and feeling, and even of religious rapture, are imitated in the condition produced by wine. "Be not drunk with wine, but filled with the Spirit," implies as much. *The indulgence of animal instincts was also tried.* "The delights of the children of men." Solomon was a melancholy example of a great soul debased by a wild indulgence of animal passion. 2. *He tried those pleasures which feed the desire of display.* There is a feeling of pride in human nature which has a natural outlet in parade and show. We court admiration, and the distinction of being an object of envy. Solomon had great riches, tribute from foreign kings, numerous servants, houses, and gardens—all that could support splendour and magnificence. The homage paid to great estate and grandeur increases the outward happiness of this life. Men make wealth and display the standard of honour. 3. *He tried those pleasures which minister to a sense of refinement.* There are pleasures more exalted than the indulgence of our lower instincts—more worthy of the dignity of our nature. The royal sage employed himself in works of constructive skill—noble architecture, vineyards, gardens, pools of water, groves. He enjoyed the delights of music. Such pleasures engage some of the noblest powers of the mind, they lend a grace and elegance to life, they assuage the troubles of the heart, and they fill up the pauses of sensual pleasures which so soon tire the power of enjoyment. They are more congenial to our better nature. They take us beyond the mere things themselves, and are not unworthy to represent spiritual delights. They furnish a parable of Divine joys. Worldly refinement is a close imitation of religion. *They yield but a temporary joy.* "For my heart rejoiced in all my labour." Misery can exist beneath them all, and as they vanish with life they cannot be our chief good. God permits some men to run through the entire scale of human happiness to show others that the best of this world cannot fill the soul. II. It was tried under the Restraints and Control of Wisdom. "Yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom." "Wisdom remained with me." He did not rush headlong into sensual enjoyments, but tested them with calm reflection and composure. He did not allow himself to be blindly led by passion, but was under the guidance of a mind regulated by prudence. 1. *Such a course is distinguished from that of the mere voluptuary.* Such plunge into pleasure and do not allow the control of the higher faculties. Wisdom is left behind. The man is a slave to passion. Unless the mind retains its supremacy and dignity, our trial of wordly pleasure cannot even merit the poor name of an experiment. 2. *Such a course may be expected to yield a hopeful result.* (1.) *It saves the soul from utter debasement.* When the voice of reason is hushed, and a man is abandoned entirely to sensuality, there is but little prospect that he will escape the snare. (2.) *Conscience is on the side of reason and right; and is effectual when reason is released from the control of passion.* (3.) *A man is not condemned to hopeless slavery while his mind is free.* He preserves an instrument which can help him to recover his liberty. III. It was tried with an Honest Endeavour to discover what was the Chief Good of Man. "Till I might see what was good for the sons of men," &c. It was not the love of pleasure for its own sake that prompted him. The experiment was made in all honesty to find out what, on the whole, was best for the sons of men. We must expect that like experiments will be made in such a world as this. 1. *It is not always evident, at first, what is best.* A life devoted

to wisdom has superior advantages over one of pleasure, yet, for aught we know, the enjoyment of the world's pleasure may be better for us than a cold and severe wisdom, which only serves to increase our pains and anxieties. The mystery and uncertainty of human things is some justification for making a trial of this kind 2. *Practical wisdom can only be gained by experience.* This requires repeated trials. We can only be said really to know that of human life which we have ascertained by trial. It is well when life's solemn lessons are quickly learned, and we become truly wise before worldly pleasure completely injures our moral force, and claims us for her own.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 3. He who indulges in the coarse mirth excited by wine, with the hope that a superior wisdom will preserve him from moral danger, runs the risk of being shorn of his strength in the lap of luxury.

He who gives the reins to pleasure may never recover his command.

Human life is so short and uncertain that we should come to an early decision concerning our Chief Good.

How much use of wit and reason soever men may have in the pursuance of earthly delights, yet while they are seeking in their hearts to give themselves away to these things, they are but taking hold of folly. And though the foolish sinner does not look upon his way while he is pursuing his idols, yet when God awakes him, whether in wrath or mercy, he will see and be forced to say that he hath been doing nothing but taking hold on folly [*Nisbet*].

The original goes thus, "in the number of the days of their life," as showing the fewness of man's days, so that they may be numbered. For as the Poet speaketh, *Pauperis est numerare pecus.* It is a sign of a poor man to number his cattle; so it is a proof of the scantiness of man's days that number doth so easily measure them [*Jermin*].

Verse 4. In producing works of utility and adornment, man enjoys a pleasure beyond the value of the things themselves.

Some kind of activity is necessary for the happiness of those whose lot does not require them to toil for subsistence. No one can be happy in a life of soft enjoyment—passively receiving the gifts of pleasure. There must be some means of employing the active powers of the mind.

The power of constructing great works is part of the likeness of the Divine Nature. The beginning of all these things is laid in the thought of man's mind. All the devices of human industry and skill have been developed from ideas. And what is creation, but the Divine thought taking form and expression in eternal things? It is God-like to possess the power to devise and produce great works.

For how much the magnificence is greater in the structure of houses, either in respect of their multitude or cost, by so much the shame is greater, that the soul is not adorned. Let that be built up carefully; let humility be the pavement of it, let hope be the roof of it, let faith be the pillars of it; on this side let justice be towards men, on that side devotion towards God. And let love, an excellent artificer, neatly join all these together, and then there will be a house for wisdom to dwell in [*Jermin*].

We may use our means of living to administer to our necessity, and the culture of our mind and taste; or to feed the desire of display and vain show.

A Greek Father says, that Solomon's confession of the planting of vineyards contains a catalogue of his vain affections, that "Wine immoderately taken is the nourishment of intemperancy, the bane of youth, the reproach of old age, the shame of women, the prison of madness."

Verse 5. Man still finds his delight in what is but the degenerate imitation of Paradise. Buildings and palaces would soon cease to please. He must have the pleasures of the open air, the sweet refreshments of gardens.

Let those to whom God hath afforded these delights have in their gardens, as Joseph had, a sepulchre—that is, let them in their pleasures remember their death. And as Joesph's sepulchre in his garden was made the sepulchre of Christ, so it were good also that such in their gardens—that is, in their delights—would think of the misery which He suffered for them [*Jermin*].

The church is the true garden of God, enclosed from the wilderness of the world, and tended with special care. All possible varieties are compelled to grow in the garden, so the church includes every variety of mind, temper, and disposition; affording special encouragements and means of spiritual growth for each. Yet God has some garden plants in the wilderness; the fruits of the Spirit may be brought forth outside the domain of Christendom.

Verse 6. Large pools were necessary for watering the gardens and orchards. The Church of God needs her fountains near.

Nature, though free with her bountiful blessings, leaves much for man to do. Water is provided, but human contrivance is necessary to conduct it to every place where it is required. We have our part to do in preparing our souls to be proper receptacles of the plentiful grace of God.

But that from these pools of water, we may draw something that shall be wholesome for us; let us make our eyes pools of water, that so a sorrow for our sins may wash them away with the watering of it, and cleanse us from them by the current of amendment in the course of our life. Or else let us make pools of charity, therewith to water the decayed trees of misery; therewith to moisten the dry ground of want and necessity. Charity is *Rehoboth*, the well of breadth, a name given by Isaac to a well which his servants digged; for charity doth spread abroad her waters wheresoever is need of them [*Jermin*].

Let us make us pools by digging into the depths of heavenly knowledge. There is nothing better than this Divine fountain, by which the dryness and barrenness of our souls is made wet and moistened, by which virtues do spring up in us, so that even a grove of good desires and works doth sprout forth in our lives [*Gregory Nyssenus*].

Verse 7. The vanity of man is fed by that display of grandeur which raises the admiration of others.

Servants born in the house would be endowed with natural fidelity. Men make use of natural laws to serve their own ambition.

It is not the lot of all to be attended by numerous trains of servants, but if we are the sons of the heavenly king, the angels wait upon us. The heirs of salvation have, even under the disadvantages of the present state, some signs of royal dignity.

In the heavenly household, the greatest, waits upon the least. Man is greatest, not when exacting, but when performing service.

Verse 8. The love of gold and silver tends to burden the heart more than the love of large possessions in cattle, &c. A man is more likely to worship the image of wealth than wealth itself.

The homage paid to wealth is a strong temptation to indulge the illusion of superiority.

Gifts persuade even the gods, and gold is more potent with men than a thousand arguments [*Plato*].

Wealth honours wealth; income pays respect to income; but it is wont to cherish in its secret heart an unmeasured contempt for poverty. It is the possession of wealth, and of the social power which is conferred by wealth, which constitutes the title to honour. To believe that a man with £60 a year is just as much deserving of respect as a man with £6000, you

must be seriously a Christian. A philosophical estimate of men and things is not really proof against the inroads of the sentiment which makes the possession of mere income the standard of honour [*Liddon*].

The most obvious danger which worldly possessions present to our spiritual welfare is, that they become practically a substitute in our hearts for that One Object to which our supreme devotion is due. They are present; God is unseen. They are means at hand of effecting what we want: whether God will hear our petitions for those wants is uncertain; or rather, I may say, certain in the negative. Thus they promise and are able to be gods to us, and such gods too as require no service, but, like dumb idols, exalt the worshipper, impressing him with a notion of his own power and security. Religious men are able to repress, nay extirpate, sinful desires; but as to wealth, they cannot easily rid themselves of a secret feeling that it gives them a footing to stand upon—an importance, a superiority; and in consequence they get attached to the world, lose sight of the duty of bearing the Cross, become dull and dim-sighted, and lose their delicacy and precision of touch, are numbed (so to say) in their fingers' ends, as regards religious interests and prospects [*J. H. Newman*].

Music is a kind of language, and has a voice independent of the forms of speech. It has an universal eloquence, a power to withdraw even the dull and the sensual for awhile from their grosser existence. It is a luxury to feel strongly, and to allow the soul to be dissolved in harmony. But whatever exalts the feelings without leading to right practice inflicts moral injury.

We may understand "the delights of the sons of men" of music generally, great being the power which the delight of music hath upon men. Of which King Theodoric writing to Boetius in Cassiodore saith—"When she cometh from the secret of nature, as it were the Queen of the senses, adorned with her musical figures; other thoughts skip away, and she causeth all things to be cast out, that there may be a delight only of hearing her. She sweeteneth grief, mollifieth rage, mitigateth cruelty, quickeneth laziness, giveth rest to the watchful, maketh her chaste who hath been defiled with unclean love, and that which is a most blessed kind of curing, by most sweet pleasures driveth away the passions of the mind, and by the subjection of things that are insensible obtaineth command over the senses." But though this be "the delight of the sons of men," let the delight of the sons of God be the music and harmony of their lives unto God's commandments [*Jermin*].

Verse 9. Solomon compares his greatness as a worldly-wise man, not with private characters, but with official. He was great, yet it was only "more than they that were before him in Jerusalem," not more than they that were in virtue and holiness before him. Worldly greatness is not to be compared with spiritual.

Men imagine that the greatness of their works and possessions is transferred to themselves, that their magnificence can be determined by measures of surface. The Rich Fool thought that the enlarging of his barns would make the foundations of his life surer and more lasting.

The most exalted human wisdom cannot save us from becoming a prey to vanity. We may by means of it conquer sensuality, and yet end in the worship of ourselves.

While the outward man revels in pleasure, the inward man may be yearning for a higher life.

There is some hope for a man who has made even a foolish experiment upon principles of reason. He who leaves wisdom behind him, when he plunges into worldly pleasures, destroys the bridge by which alone he can return.

Solomon could not have come to the conclusion that "all was vanity," unless he discovered that there was something in himself which was not vanity—thus, "wisdom remained with him." Hugh

of S. Victor says, "He was able to speak *that* against vanity not vainly."

So prone are men enjoying plenty of outward delights to lose even the exercise of common prudence and reason, and to give themselves up as beasts to the leading of their sensual appetites, that it is a mercy much to be marked and acknowledged for a man to have any measure of the exercise thereof continued in that case. For Solomon speaks of this as a remarkable thing, which hardly would be expected by many, that he having "all the delights of the sons of men," being so great and increased more than all that had been before him, might yet truly say this, "Also my wisdom remaineth with me" [*Nisbet*].

Verse 10. The heart is often led by the eye, the seat of moral power becomes subject to the senses.

The eye, the guardian of our safety, may be allured by a false light that "leads to bewilder, and dazzles to blind,"—by false *philosophies*, *pleasures*, *religions*.

Man received the first wounds of sin through the eye. The very sentinel placed aloft by heaven to guard us must be defended by God's especial grace.

Let us remember how unhappily their eyes were opened unto them that were in Paradise, which were enlightened so long as they had them shut unto sin. Where we read "the eye is the light of the body," the Greek is, the lamp, the candle of the body: for as a lamp burneth very well, and giveth good light so long as it is shut up and kept close within some room; but if it be set in the open air, is soon blown out by the wind; so the eye, if it be kept shut from vanity by a watchful carefulness, then it giveth the best light to the body. But if it be wantonly and negligently opened, then the good light of it is soon put out [*Jermin*].

There is some earthly recompense for human labours; but, at best, man is never truly rewarded here for all his pains. A transitory joy is but a poor compensation to set over against the infinite sadness of life, and the terrible forebodings of the heart.

The eye, the most far-reaching of all our powers, cannot give us lasting joy. It may range freely over every delight, but the spirit of man will remain in bondage till it is delivered by the coming of the Holy Ghost.

Labour there was in the seeking of it, labour in the possession of it, and yet this is the All which man seeketh of all his labour. This is the portion which the Preacher saith he had; there being no sickness, no enemy, no other cross either in mind or body, at home or abroad, to deprive him of it. So that we have here under the law, the Prodigal under the Gospel, asking his portion of his father, which is divided to him, and spent by him in the far country of this world upon worldly delights [*Jermin*].

Verse 11. "All the works." 1. In collecting riches. 2. In increasing the magnificence of the State. 3. In multiplying the means of social enjoyment.

It is well that we should look upon the works we have wrought in the world, till we discover that, apart from God, they are labour, weariness, and pain upon every remembrance of them. To think upon our ways, to survey our position, is the first step towards obtaining our true good.

The pangs of spiritual famine—the want of God, may be felt by one whose lot it is to live in the midst of a profusion of this world's plenty and pleasure.

Our works in the world often outlast our joy. The Royal Moralist did not look upon his joy, but upon his labours.

Vanity has two ingredients—hollowness and aimlessness. Without God, all things are unsubstantial; they have no solid and lasting worth. Human labour, when not inspired by the Divine idea, reaches no worthy goal. God had His witnesses for this truth in the old heathen world. Thus, in the poem of Lucretius, we read—"Therefore the race of men labours always fruitlessly,

and in vain; and life is consumed in empty cares."

The wisdom which is concerned with what is under the sun can only give us negative conclusions; can only say of true happiness—It is not here. Religion has a positive truth to set over against this—"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above."

That is vain which is empty, when there is a name, but not anything at all. A name of riches, but not the thing; a name of glory, but without the thing; a name of power, but the name only is to be found. Who is therefore so senseless as to seek after names which have not the things, and to follow after empty things which should be shunned [*St. Chrysostom*].

The Fortunate Islands, which anyone may talk of, are but mere dreams, not lying anywhere under the sun's light [*Jermin*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12—16.

Practical Wisdom.

The Royal Preacher had exercised his wisdom on speculative subjects: he now applies it to the practical matters of human life. Of such wisdom, or philosophical prudence, we learn—I. That it possesses high Absolute Value. Of all earthly treasures, wisdom has the greatest worth. This is a truth at once evident to every reflecting mind. The perception of it is quick as vision. "Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly," &c. Such wisdom may be compared to the light. 1. *Like light, wisdom is a revealing power.* Without light, our knowledge of nature would be scanty. We could only have knowledge of near objects. The distant glories of the universe are completely veiled to the blind. But light reveals them—makes all things manifest. So wisdom reveals to man the true state of things around him—his position in the world—the conditions of earthly happiness. He is thus able to form the most sagacious plans, and to use expedients for the maintenance of his life, for avoiding dangers, and varying his pleasures. In physical endowments, man is inferior to the lower animals, but he obtains supremacy over them by that wisdom which reveals to him more of that world in which he lives. 2. *Like light, wisdom is a guiding power.* "The wise man's eyes are in his head." The eyes of the wise man are where they ought to be—the lofty windows of the palace of the soul, through which she takes a large survey of the outward world, and the scene of man. The eyes of the mind, like those of the body, serve both to inform and direct. Every truth of nature or of man, that we discover, becomes for us a rule of action or duty. The facts revealed to the understanding guide us in our way through the world. He who walks in darkness runs the risk of stumbling. All nature is against the fool. 3. *Like light wisdom is a vitalising power.* Light is absolutely necessary to the growth and preservation of all kinds of life. The light of the day not only warms, but fertilises. The sun is a source of energy, performing all the work of this lower world. So practical wisdom is the real strength of man's life here. Folly is darkness—a dull negation—unproductive of vitality or beauty—generates fear. The ignorant are the victims of unnecessary fears, as we see from the history of superstition. Wisdom is a light to quicken all things necessary for man as an inhabitant of this world. It supplies that vital energy by which we do our work. By the life-giving power of wisdom, man conquers nature, by directing her forces to serve his own uses. The dull existence of the fool is not worthy of the name of life. We learn of this practical wisdom—II. That it is complicated with certain facts giving rise to painful doubts and questionings. The superiority of wisdom to folly is beyond dispute. It is at once apparent. Like the light, this truth is its own evidence. But there are attendant facts which lead to painful doubts and questionings as to whether wisdom, on the whole, has such a

superior advantage; or whether, in the upshot of things, the wise man is better off than the fool. 1. *We are not sure that posterity will preserve the fruits of our work and wisdom.* Men labour that they may increase their earthly joys, amass wealth, and accomplish some wise designs; but how often are the fruits of their anxious toil spoiled and wasted by those who come after! As the custom of the world is folly, the Royal Preacher could only expect that his successor would be a foolish man—according to the general type. Every worker upon merely human principles, no matter how accomplished, must say at last, "I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought." The fact, that what we have gathered with such labour and pains may thus be wasted and dissipated by others, is enough to make the wisest serious and sad. The speech acquires a painful hue of reflectiveness, and the contemplation of life becomes a distress. 2. *All our diligence and wisdom cannot avail to save us from oblivion.* "There is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever." It is not intended to deny all posthumous fame. Some names will live through the whole range of time, names like Moses—the earliest in literature, and sounding through the endless songs of heaven. But the great bulk of mankind are not remembered by posterity—the wise and the fool alike are soon forgotten: "One Cæsar lives, a thousand are forgot." Even if we live in fame ever so long, and are at last forgotten; when compared with eternity, this is equivalent to oblivion. 3. *All our wisdom cannot save us from the common doom of the race.* "One event happeneth to all." Our wisdom and skill cannot save us from accidents, pains, and from that sum of all fears and distresses—death. The terrible necessity of death awaits alike the foolish and the wise. We take pains to gather knowledge, and the maxims of wisdom; death comes, and our fancied superiority over others vanishes. If there be no future, the most sagacious of men may mournfully ask at the close of life, "Why was I then more wise?" The wise and foolish appear to go out of life in the same manner. All differences are lost in the darkness of the tomb. Let us learn—*that heavenly wisdom is complicated with no painful facts to fill us with doubts and misgivings.* Nothing can arise to dull the pure splendour of this Divine gift. The glory of it only increases as all that is precious in life is fading away. We can only be saved from the fate of oblivion when we seek the "honour that cometh from God only," when we are "confessed before the angels," and our names inscribed in the Book of Life. All who are truly wise shall be fixed in the regions of immortality—shall "shine as the stars for ever and ever."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 12. Whatever we desire to understand, it is necessary that we should not only look upon it, but behold it—there must be a prolonged look. The object must not only be seen, but seen through. All men are bound to see what lies in their way, but few see with the eye of intelligent observation. The wealth of the mind comes not as a sudden gift of fortune: it is gathered slowly.

He who contemplates human nature must be prepared to find it a mixed scene of wisdom, madness, and folly. There are wise men who govern their conduct by reason, and maxims gained from experience and observation. There are others who have some intellectual power, but it is rashly applied. There is no sufficient guiding principle—their conduct is madness—power wasted in an irregular manner, without order or plan. There are simple men who are easily led, and become the willing dupes of cunning craft.

The evils of the world are incurable by human means. We can only expect that the future will be as the past. The dream of human perfection is not realised. The paths of sin and folly are old and well worn. Generations to come will be content to travel in them.

Posterity may forget our wisdom, and destroy the fruits of our labours.

But he who works with eternity in view will find the grave a place of restitution.

How vain are those possessions which the most foolish of mankind can disperse as chaff before the wind!

It is well noted by Hugo, that first he looked upon wisdom as thereby coming to behold madness and folly. For as he speaketh—"No one goeth to darkness that he may see darkness; but he cometh to the light, that by the light he may see, not only light, but light and darkness also. First therefore the Preacher saith he beheld wisdom, so that he might behold in wisdom itself what itself is, and by itself madness and folly, which wisdom itself is not" [*Jermin*].

The utmost comfort that creatures can yield, when happiness is sought in them, may soon be attained. It is no such depth but that it may be sounded by those who will put it to the trial. One man may in a short time find out so much thereof as that he may defy others after him to find more. Whence appears a manifest difference between heavenly and earthly consolations, the heavenly being still upon the growing hand, and incomprehensible by any of the saints till in heaven they be filled with all the fulness of God. For here Solomon professeth himself to have been at the bottom of earthly delights, so as none after him could go deeper. "What can the man do who cometh after the king?" [*Nisbet*].

Verse 13. There are endowments of human nature, and improvements in character, which, though not distinctly spiritual, have high absolute value. Moral virtue and practical wisdom may beautify and adorn the character so as to win Divine commendation. The young man in the Gospel fell short of the highest excellence, yet "Jesus beholding him, loved him."

There is great variety in the courses which natural men take in the pursuit of happiness. Some employ the highest prudence and caution, others are abandoned to the most reckless folly. There is all the difference between darkness and light in human conduct, even when it comes short of the highest requirements.

Let us not despise the natural beauties and graces of character. All light should be welcomed. The Gospel has an attraction for all that is pure and lovely in human nature.

It is the property of good things that they do not need an external praiser, but themselves when they are seen do testify their grace. It is a greater excellency which is approved by sight, than that which is commended by speech [*St. Ambrose*].

It is of human wisdom whereof I conceive him to speak, which therefore, though he could not be free from vanity, yet doth he prefer before folly, as much as light before darkness. Now light hath God himself for the praiser of it, and it is the first thing that God praised. "Let there be light," is the first word that God ever spoke; and that "God saw the light to be good," is the first praise that God ever gave. As soon as God made the light, He divided the darkness from it, as if he would not have the excellency thereof to be dishonoured by the company of it. Let it therefore be our care also to divide wisdom from folly. The society of the one doth much shame the other, and indeed most unworthy is folly, so much as to be joined in comparison with wisdom [*Jermin*].

Verse 14. Sensual pleasures dim the light of reason, and weaken man's power to direct his way.

When the animal in man surmounts the rational, the eyes which should be the light of the body, are degraded to the dust, and blinded.

The superior light, which the wise man of this world holds aloft to illuminate his path in life, does not prevent him from taking his last step into the darkness of the grave. The light that comes from beyond the sun can alone pierce that darkness.

A fool hath not his eyes in his head, but in his heels. For when the contemplative power of the soul is busied in worldly things, the nature of the

eyes passeth to the heels, which the serpent pursueth and biteth with his teeth [*Jermin*].

Verse 15. Thoughts on the dread humility of dying will betimes oppress the most favoured and exalted of men. The terrible realities of our troubled life must sooner or later come home to the individual,—"So it happeneth even to me."

In the voyage of life, our fellow passengers are marked by a great variety. There are rich and poor, obscure and noble, wise and foolish, good and evil. But one fate awaits us all—total shipwreck. We must all sink into the gulf of death. Our only consolation lies in the hope that we shall be supplied with Divine strength to climb up the other bank of life.

To the wise man of the world, there is humiliation in the thought of the disgraceful necessity of death. But Jesus has passed through the tomb and sanctified it, so that for the Christian, death becomes the gate of life. No one who has learned the knowledge of the holy will have mournfully to ask when his last hour draws near—"Why was I then more wise?" For such a man, the tree of knowledge becomes the tree of life.

A man is placed in a high situation, receives an expensive education at school or college, and a still more expensive one of time and experience. And then, just when we think all this ripe wisdom, garnered up from so many fields, shall find its fullest use, we hear that all is over, he has passed from among us, and the question, hideous in its suggestiveness, arises—"Why was he then more wise?" Asked from this world's stand-point—if there is no life beyond the grave, then the mighty work of God is all to end in nothingness. But if this is only a state of infancy, only the education for eternity, then to ask why such a mind is taken from us is just as absurd as to question why the tree of the forest has its first training in the nursery garden. This is but the nursery ground, from whence we are to be transplanted into the great forest of God's eternal universe. There is an absence of all distinction between the death of one man and another. The wise man dies as the fool with respect to circumstances [*Robertson*].

The Preacher objecteth, that although the wise man seeth so far into the nature and condition of things, yet that one event happeneth to them all. And, as to this objection. 1. He granteth it, "Then said I in my heart," I said that it was so, and in my heart confessed it to be true. 2. He applieth it, "As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me." I cannot deny it in myself, of whom it cannot be denied that my wisdom is the greatest of any. 3. He repineth at it in these words, "And why was I then more wise?" Why did I so carefully search into the nature and condition of things, forecast the events of things? 4. He delivereth his sentence, "Then I said in my heart that this also is vanity." Then I concluded of it, and said so in my heart when I had considered of it [*Jermin*].

Verse 16. It is always a startling thing to see the rapidity with which the wisest and the best are forgotten. We plough our lives in water, leaving no furrow; two little waves break upon the shore, but no further vestige of our existence is left [*Robertson*].

The footprints we leave on the sands of time are soon washed away by the advancing tide.

The words, "And how dieth the wise man?" in the original are an exclamation—"But O, how is it that the wise man dieth as the fool!" This is not the conclusion of a cold and severe logic, but the expression of deep emotion. Beneath all the glory of this life, there is an unutterable sorrow. There are truths too deep for words. They are only to be uttered with a gasp and a sigh.

Faith alone can cure the terrible melancholy with which this view of life afflicts the soul. The intellect, the throne of human wisdom, is part of the Divine image, and God will not suffer it to die in imperfect rudiments. Man

has in him some resemblances of the Eternal God, who will not leave His image in the grave, nor suffer this spark of Him to see corruption.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17—23.

The Confessions of a Pleasure-Seeker.

I. That his life's promise has failed. The pleasure-seeker begins life with high hopes. The intoxication of mirth exalts his imagination, and he lives, for a brief space, in the transports of joy. He looks forward to many years of merriment, free from every invasion of sorrow. But as time passes, and he learns the lessons of experience, and awakens to a sense of the solemn realities around him, life's fair promise is discovered to be a delusion. He has lived for pleasure, and trusted in the hopes it inspired: but these have failed. 1. *It promised that life would be bliss, but now he deplores the very fact of existence.* (Verse 17.) The pleasures of the world, by their agreeable variety and adaptation to our lower nature, promise to fill up every moment of life, and drive away all care and repining; but they soon clog the senses, the power of enjoyment is blunted, and life itself regarded with disgust. 2. *It promised that life would still be unfolding new scenes of pleasure, but now it has led him to blank despair.* (Verse 20.) He had hoped much from his high capacity for pleasure, from his wealth, from his skill in those great public works which would promote his magnificence, and draw attention to his genius. But now his ingenuity is exhausted, his spirits spent, and all is flat and weary—the world has no more to offer. The night of despair has come, and the bright and gaudy colours of life have faded away into confusion. **II. That he is tormented by some ever-recurring thought.** (Verses 18, 21.) The Royal Preacher had dwelt upon the idea before, that his wealth and all the products of his labour and skill must be left to some unworthy successor. This is with him a standing grief. Here the same thought rises again. What he had gathered with care, and produced by great labour of contrivance, would be laid waste by some foolish man. Amidst all the pleasures of his life, this terrible thought *would* come to the surface. Men of pleasure find that painful and anxious thoughts are ever arising to disturb their enjoyment. The reflection is forced upon them that time is fast passing away, that their glory will soon descend into the grave, that all their earthly joy will fade in the last sickness and before the tomb, and that in the distant future even their very children will forget them in their own merry laugh and joy. Some deep thought is ever coming uppermost before which pleasure grows pale. **III. That he enjoys no true repose.** (Verse 23.) He has no rest during the progress of his work, nor even when his task is done. The night, which invites repose, is invaded by care and trouble. His wealth can procure luxury; but the heart is unquiet, and sleep is not to be had at any price. This shows us—1. *That there is a majesty in our nature which disdains to be satisfied with mere worldly pleasure.* 2. *That a sense of the solemn facts of our nature and destiny cannot be banished from the mind by mirth.* 3. *That the God of our soul can alone satisfy it.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 17. If God has disappeared from the efforts of men, a disgust of life appears sooner or later [*Gerlach*].

There is a contempt of the world which is not genuine religion. Pleasure may heartlessly spurn away those with whom she has played; they may become weary of the world, and yet be without the consolations of God. The disgust of life may lead to remorse instead of true repentance, and a stoical resignation to inflexible fate may closely imitate the calm anticipation of the joys of heaven.

The disorder of the mind darkens the whole scene of life. The brightest glory of the world may be clouded by the gloom of our own hearts.

To hate life is to destroy the foundations of all happiness, for without existence no happiness could be possible. The gift of salvation can turn existence into a blessing. Our creation is a pledge of guardianship. It is to us a sure sign and token that "God will not forsake the work of His own hands."

The original expresseth itself more fully, "I hated lives," not only this kind of life, or that kind of life; nor only this time of life, or that time of life; not only the life of this man, or of that man; but the lives of all men, of all kinds, of all times. I hated mine own life, "because the work that is done under the sun is grievous unto me;" the life of others, because "All is vanity and vexation of spirit" [*Jermin*].

The things of this life have true bitterness, false contentment, certain grief, uncertain pleasure, hard labour, fearful rest, matter full of misery, hope empty of happiness [*Augustine*].

Verse 18. It is only the resultof our labours that we pass on to posterity. The toil is ours, and theirs the fruit. The effects of our labour and skill remain after we are gone. They endure for others, but not for us.

We are only the conveyers of the things of this life to others, not the possessors of them.

As a thief comes in one night, and bears away the fruits of many toilsome days, so a man may leave his possessions to some one unworthy and unprofitable.

Man is but a tenant under the great Lord of all. He has no lease of life; but is liable to be turned out at a moment's notice. He occupies his little holding for a brief space, and then departs, leaving all he has gathered and wrought to those who come after.

We cannot be truly said to possess that which can be severed from us, leaving us poor indeed. God is the only portion of the soul for ever.

Verse 19. He who has gathered spiritual treasure is rich in the wealth of immortality, and will be for ever master of all his possessions. In the future kingdom only the wise shall rule.

The works of faithful souls shall follow them beyond the world. They shall not be left behind to run the chance of being wasted or spoiled by others.

Man has but a brief sovereignty over his earthly labours. A fool, from motives of mischief, or from some vain notion of improvement, may spoil the work of the wisest man.

It is one of the vanities of wealth that a man knows not to what use it will be put by his successor.

Verse 20. Here we have set down the two causes of despair—vanity and vexation. Vanity is a great cause of despair, for when men have laboured hard, and find no success, that makes them despair of any success [*Jermin*].

Even the utmost depths of despair cannot overwhelm the cry of the soul.

The darkest hour of the night is before the dawn. The darkest hour of the soul may be the prelude to a cheerful and prosperous day.

Some will not seek the highest resource until all that is earthly has failed. They must be driven to feed upon the husks of despair before they will think upon the bread which is in their Father's house.

Verse 21. An excess of carefulness for posterity may prove a hindrance in the duty that lies before us.

We enter into the labours of others, build upon their foundation, and come into the easy possession of what they have won by careful thought and labour. If we are true spiritual workers, we have a wealthy heritage. Let us strive to use it well.

Even the best men must be content to accept the failure of much of the results of their works and wisdom. In every mental and moral effort for the good of others, there is some waste of power. The real effective force of our life is small—both in regard to the present generation, and in regard to posterity.

The Lord in His wise Providence sees it fit that great things of the world should fall for a portion to men who have neither wit nor experience for purchasing or improving them, that all may be convinced that these things are not infallible signs of His love; and that men who get them may be allured to their duty by them, or the more severely punished when he reckons with them [*Nisbet*].

Verse 22. The pleasures of the world depart one by one, and leave men the sad heritage of weariness and vexation.

There is nothing here that is an adequate recompense for our anxiety of thought, and wasting labour. If this life be all, even our supremacy in the empire of mind is but a poor consolation, seeing our stay is so short and death strikes the sceptre from our hand.

It is well to pause in the midst of our labours, and ask ourselves to what profit do they tend? This is the attitude in which the soul hears the voice of God, bidding her return to enduring pleasures and works of lasting profit.

For when it is asked what hath a man of all his labour, perhaps some one may answer—Behold I fill up my sacks, my walls do hardly hold that which I get, my gains do flow out every way, and money runs like a stream into my purse. Yet this is no answer; for that thy sack may be filled, thy soul fevereth with cares; that thy gold may increase, thine honesty is diminished; that thou mayest be richly clothed without, thou art spoiled and left naked within [*Augustine*].

Verse 23. The joys of the children of this world are but the illusions of a dream. There is a deep sorrow running through life which men strive in vain to hide.

Much of the work of the world is pursued beyond what is simply necessary for the sustenance and ornament of life. Men try to avoid being left alone with themselves. They contrive to draw off the attention from their own misery. Yet the grief of life remains, and, like a fatal distemper, cleaves to the soul.

Sleep is the gift of God, who secures it to the contented mind and clear conscience.

God has access to our spirit at all times, and when at night we rest from labours and strive to shut out care, He can trouble us with unknown terrors.

There is only one pillow on which the heart can rest—the bosom of the Infinite Father.

The magnetic needle has one position of rest—when it trembles to the pole. In all other positions it is under constraint, and tends to swing itself to rest. So the soul can have no true repose until the affections rest in God.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 24—26.

THE WISEST USE OF THE PRESENT WORLD.

I. A proper enjoyment of the blessings of life. The good things of this world can never bring us true and lasting happiness if we live for them alone. But we must not despair of finding external happiness even in these, if we use them aright. There must be some lawful means of enjoying the world's good. The Creator, in His works, has provided both for ornament and delight. We must not be as sulky children, refusing to enjoy ourselves when He invites us. To condemn all that the world offers to cheer the spirit of man, without showing how it may be properly enjoyed, or substituting some other pleasures, would either drive the soul to despair, or plunge it more deeply into unlawful pleasures. The state of our souls determines what is good or bad in pleasure. We project our nature upon the external world. "To the pure, all things are pure." How are we to enjoy the blessings of this life? 1. *They should be subordinated to our higher wants.* As long as we remember that they only minister to our lower wants, we preserve the true dignity of our soul. He who has the highest good

can rightly and well enjoy the lowest. When pleasure is made the end of life, the soul becomes debased, and unfit for the vision of God. The pure light of heaven in the soul can transfigure all things in life. Christ used the world, but He had superior meat, drink, and joy than He could find here. To Him, the world was a place of duty and trial; but He tasted the world's pleasures as a "Brook by the way." 2. *They should be used with moderation of desire.* "Enjoy good in his labour." There is a happiness naturally arising out of the things of life. What we force out of them beyond their natural yield will only prove a bitter portion. The path of the wise is ever traced between dangerous extremes. 3. *Superior power and facility of enjoyment must not tempt us to abuse them.* (Verse 25.) Solomon had riches and position—means to procure enjoyments. He had the skill to devise exquisite pleasures, and to secure an agreeable variety. But he found that all must be under the control of some exalted purpose. The best gifts of heaven may be abused; but while reason and conscience govern, we are safe. II. A recognition of the Divine source of the blessings of life. (Verse 24.) 1. *The blessings of this life are the gift of God.* They are His provisions for the creature whom He has made. A remembrance of the great source of all our good makes life sacred. To abuse this present world is to take an unfair advantage of infinite kindness. To worship God's gifts instead of Himself is idolatry. We must use God's creatures for the same end for which He made them—His glory. 2. *The power to enjoy them comes from God.* If we can enjoy His gifts with contentment and cheerfulness, this power comes from Him. How soon God may destroy our happiness, by either removing His gifts, or depriving us of the power of enjoying them! 3. *Their true value and use can only be known by Divine teaching.* If we can taste with grateful cheerfulness what is provided for us here on our way to our superior home, the idea is divinely imparted to us. When we realize the true idea of life, we can best enjoy the world. The repose of mind, and peace of conscience thence arising, are favourable to the truest enjoyment. III. A conviction that there are Divine provisions for the good. There is an apparent indifference on the part of God to moral distinctions in the human character. Yet there are, even in this life, indications of retributive justice. God will make abundant provision for the man who is "good in His sight." 1. *He will be supplied with the true guiding principle of life.* "Wisdom and knowledge." For lack of these, many leave the best pleasures of life untasted. They are the dupes of imagination and fancy. When our earthly enjoyments are not held in check by a superior guiding power, they turn to vexation and misery. A careful observance of the facts of life, and the wisdom to employ them for the highest ends, will secure for us the purest enjoyments. 2. *He will have the rational comforts of life.* To him "joy" shall be given; and this depends upon the state of the heart. "A man's life" (not the sustenance of his life, but the life by which he lives) "consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Existence is the gift of God's goodness to all men, but the life of life, the joy and real soul of it, is a mark of His favour. IV. A conviction that the impious use of the Creator's gifts is ruinous. (Verse 26.) The sinner, as he riots in pleasure, may appear to have the best of the world, but he is only laying up a store of misery. The justice of heaven is not a wild passion of revenge, but is calm and dignified; and though the sword of God is not in haste to smite, yet, if not averted by repentance, it will descend with fearful destruction upon the sinner. A wrong use of this world must end in utter ruin.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 24. True piety is opposed to asceticism. Revealed Religion does not destroy the plain truths and duties of nature.

Piety obliges no man to be dull [*South*].

The common actions of life may be sanctified by a general purpose of consecration to God.

The Creator not only sends us gifts which minister to our use and delight, but even the power to enjoy is also His gift.

Christianity has ennobled many words which once served the uses of superstition by making them the representatives of nobler thoughts. In like manner, the worldly man's triad—to eat, drink, and be merry—may be ennobled by an abiding intention of pleasing God in all that we do.

Christians *may* have earthly joy. Let there be no half-remorseful sensations as though they were stolen joys. Christ had no sympathy with that tone of mind which scowls on human happiness. His first manifestation of power was at a marriage feast. Who would check the swallows' flight, or silence the gush of happy melody which the thrush pours forth in spring? [*Robertson.*]

Verse 25. He can best lay down the law of life who is qualified by experience.

I take the original word here used to signify to call or cry aloud, and so should render the verse according to this sense: "Who can call for more freely, who can enjoy more speedily, the good of this life than I can?" And, therefore, who should also be believed rather than I, who deny the enjoying of the good of this life to be the good of man? From hence we may take this lesson, that no one do promise to himself, or take upon himself, those things which those who have been far more able than himself have not been able to perform. And for an instance: let not those promise to themselves heaven who live carelessly in religion, when it is hard for them who are very careful to attain thither [*Jermin*].

Verse 26. True goodness is that which can endure in the sight of God.

Here we have: 1. A satisfaction for the intellect—"Wisdom and knowledge." 2. A satisfaction for the affections—"Joy." 3. A satisfaction for the conscience—"Good in His sight."

Man, in the present world, is under the moral government of God, even in his pleasures. No part of his conduct is indifferent, for it has some relation to the formation of character, and therefore to our future destiny.

All the vanity, all the toilings of men after wisdom, happiness and rest, which in so many ways lead men to the grave, where ceases all the distinction which they strive to obtain on earth, are not allotted to the pious man by God; they are a curse which sin has laid upon man, but which God will make a blessing to His chosen ones. For these busy, restless creatures gather and heap up for those who are good in God's eyes. And these latter shall gratuitously receive by the sinner's labour what he seeks and finds not, what he labours for and cannot enjoy: wisdom, knowledge, joy. What is the Divine word, and whence are taken this wisdom, knowledge, and joy that in it exist? Are they not honey made by bees in the slain beasts? What are the stories that they tell us but examples of sinner's toil, of the vanity and folly into which men have fallen? [*Hamann.*]

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.—1. Season-time.] Season signifies a certain period or term; time denotes a division of time in general. 2. A time to plant, &c.] Used in O. T. as a metaphor to describe the founding and destruction of cities. 7. A time to rend and a time sew.] The rending of garments on hearing sad tidings, and sewing them when the season of grief is past. 11. In His time.] This is the emphatic part of the sentence. The fitting time is one of the chief elements in the ways of Providence, which raises in us the thought of an Infinite Wisdom. *Also He hath set the world in their heart.* The *world* here should be rendered *eternity—i.e.*, the universe considered as duration—as that which is extended in time. It is because man has eternity in his heart that he is able, from the observation of Creation, to form an idea of "His eternal power and Godhead." *So that no man can find out the work that God maketh.* Men have an idea of God and His immense dominion; but the details of the method and circumstances of His Sovereign rule are but imperfectly known. 14. It shall be forever.] God's order is fixed—His law is eternal. 15. God requireth that which is past.] Literally, God seeketh that which was crowded out. Thus God seeks out again what the revolutions of history have pushed back into the past, as if it were entirely done with. The meaning is—that the past ages of wrong and unjust suffering shall be called up again. God will investigate the case of those who have been persecuted. 18. That God might manifest them.] The disorders of the present are permitted to the end that God might test, or prove, men. *That they themselves are beasts.* Not in regard to moral character, but to the common fate of dissolution, awaiting alike both men and beasts. *They themselves—i.e.*, apart from Him who alone hath immortality, and in whose sole right is the gift of it—men, like the beasts, are all included in one sad fate. This thought is expanded in the next verse. 12. For who knoweth the Spirit of man that goeth upward.] Man has no distinct and certain knowledge of his own future destiny, or of that of other forms of life. The subject is altogether beyond the range of human experience. Like God Himself, the future state is unseen and unknown by us. We can indeed apprehend both these truths by faith; yet, from the mere human standpoint, we may reason with equal plausibility, so far as outward appearances are concerned, for or against immortality. 22. For who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?] Man cannot tell what God will do in the future with all his earthly circumstances—how far, in the great future, they will be modified or destroyed. Hence riches, &c., must have many elements of uncertainty. Therefore enjoy the present.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. *Verses* 1—8.

THE SUPREMACY OF THE DIVINE CONTROL.

Man forms designs for his own happiness, gives free scope to his powers, and traces out the course of his life. Yet there is over him a higher system of things, a stern and terrible Power by which he is overmastered and subdued. He is made, after all, to fulfil the designs of heaven. The Divine control over every domain of creation is supreme over all other sovereignties. This is evident from the following facts: I. The Divine Control is exerted throughout all time. Human history is inserted between the two eternities. In the infinite solitudes of the past, before the birth of time, the mind has not whereon to rest, nor can the eye pierce beyond the present order of things into the immense future. Between these there is a range of time, forming the platform upon which human history is erected. Here the mind can rest, and survey the rule of the Supreme. 1. *God made time for us by giving a peculiar direction to His power.* Before time was, or ever any creature was made, He dwelt in that eternity which knows no periods. No voice could be heard in that vast solitude but His own. Yet He was not content to remain thus solitary, but surrounded Himself with those intelligencies upon whom He might pour the illustrations of His wisdom and benevolence. Thus the Divine power directed by goodness has created time for us wherein all the circumstances and issues of all creatures are displayed. 2. *God rules over the whole course of time which He has made.* Origination gives a natural title to possession. God has exerted His power and wisdom both in

time and space, and therefore has an undisputed claim to reign supreme over each realm. 3. *God's Supreme Control is to be observed chiefly in the events of time.* Events take place at certain seasons, and a season is a portion cut off from time. They are its joints, or articulations—critical periods of time. What has been ripening slowly through long years comes to the birth at a moment in the grand decisive events of history. Thus the Deluge, the giving of the Law, the establishment of Judaism, the founding of Christianity, the invention of Printing, the Reformation, are some of the great births of time. They are seasons when it is most of all observed that there is a wise and Infinite Power above, directing the great issues of time. These are the joints that connect and strengthen the whole frame of human history. The smooth course of affairs often fails to excite attention, but great events startle men into surprise, and invite contemplation. The thoughtless world is thus roused to behold the mighty hand of the great Ruler of all. II. The Divine control is marked by an unchangeable order. The times and seasons in which every purpose comes to full ripeness are predetermined by God. With Him there is no disordered mixture of things—no wild confusion. Infinite wisdom cannot be taken by surprise, or plunged of a sudden into perplexity. All the events of time arise from a fixed order of things. They are determined by a plan, dimly seen by us, but traced in stern and clear lines by a steady hand, and with the precision and confidence of infinite skill. We call this regular order of things law, for so it is as seen from our point of view; but on God's side it is the exercise of will; not indeed of an uncertain and capricious nature, but following method—the will of the Father of Lights—a clear and illumined will. This is unchangeable by us, or by any other power. 1. *Infinite wisdom and power lead to such a result.* God has no need to make experiments to try some doubtful issue. He has no mistakes to repair, nor can any reason arise to oblige Him to retouch and modify His plan. In His vast design no element, however small, is omitted or overlooked. He has power to carry all His purposes into effect; hence such a Being has no cause or reason to oblige Him to depart from a fixed order. 2. *The study of nature teaches us that there must be such an order in human events.* There is such a fixed order in the physical world, in the great orbs that roll above us. The laws of nature are regular, severe, exact. We can depend upon them in their inflexible constancy. All things in the universe are ordered by number, weight, and measure. Are we to suppose that the regular plan of the Divine government is only concerned with lifeless matter, and does not also extend with equal accuracy and completeness to souls? Is man alone to be made the sport of blind chance, when all movements and changes of created things are governed by a rigid law? Man, with all the events of time that concern him, reveals an infinite complication, yet surely the boundless wisdom of God is equal to the task of governing him according to a regular plan? The most slippery elements of human affairs are held by the Divine hand. 3. *The Bible is full of this doctrine.* What reason teaches us to expect, the Bible reveals as a fact. The added light of Revelation enlarges our prospect, and strengthens our sight of the wide realms over which God rules. What is the Gospel itself but the kingdom of God, implying authority, law, and order? The more we look into God's latest Revelation, the more are we persuaded that there is nothing that concerns human nature which is left out by the Divine plan. The teaching of the Bible is that man, as an inhabitant of this world, and as a candidate for immortality, is completely under the control of the Supreme. III. The Divine control is illustrated by the whole course of human affairs. The hand of God in history can be clearly perceived by every one whose attention is at all awake. The proudest is brought, sooner or later, to confess that God has "beset him, behind and before." The kings of the earth who have "taken counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed" have either been tamed to submission, or in mad rebellion have broken

themselves against the bars of destiny. History is but a revelation of the fixed principles of Providence. A survey of this scene of man will give abundant illustration of the completeness of the Divine control throughout the whole extent of human history. 1. *It is illustrated in the individual life.* (1.) The *boundaries* of that life are determined. Birth and death are the extreme limits between which each single life receives a manifestation. Life is purely a gift. We sought it not: it was thrust upon us. Though flowing to us through human channels, it rises from the Fountain of Life. We were summoned into His presence. The time of our public appearance here was appointed by Providence, and we must accept it for good or evil. We are here, called from the abyss of nothing by the Almighty power. The time of our *departure* hence is also determined. Though that time is to us unknown, yet where our journey of life shall end is known fully to the Great Disposer of all things. He has already drawn the circle which we must fill, nor can we by all our skill and care enlarge it, nor enclose a greater area from the territory of life allotted to us. (2.) The *discipline* of that life is determined. We pass through various changes of fortune, and these are employed by Divine Providence as a means of spiritual education. We are planted, and again plucked up—we enter upon new modes of life, and old scenes pass away from us, never to return. Structures which we had raised in confidence and hope are broken down, and with a sadder heart and dearly-bought experience we build again as best we may. We are stunned by disease, as if killed by the terrible blow; and then healed again to receive what awaits us in life. In the merchandise of life, we experience the excitement of loss and gain; and what we have secured by energy and kept with care we may be obliged, in the emergencies of fortune, to cast away. (3.) *The emotions* of our life are determined. We have no command over our joys or our sorrows. They arise from the constitution of our nature, acted upon by the various changes in the world around us. There are times when sorrow lifts the sluices of our tears, and we cannot intercept their flow; again the season of joy comes and shakes our countenance into ripples of laughter. There are times too of excessive emotion, when to mourn or to dance seems to be the only fit expression of the great force with which both grief and pleasure possess our frame. (4.) The seasons of *special duty* are also determined. War and peace, silence and speech, are here selected as the type of many. In a world of conflicting interests and passions, there are times when even the most peaceful disposition is dragged into a contest, and then the season comes when the conditions of peace ought to be cheerfully accepted. There are times when silence is the highest duty, lest we should pluck the unripe fruit of wisdom, or speak words out of season to some heavy heart. Then the moment comes when we should hold no longer from speaking, but give utterance to the thought within us to instruct, to comfort, and to bless. The seasons both of silence and speech are forced upon us, when the most sullen is compelled to utterance, and the most noisy tongue is silenced. 2. *It is illustrated in the life of nations.* The history of nations is analogous to that of individuals, but it is drawn to a larger scale. It is developed through greater measures of time. Nations, like individuals, have peculiarities of character, and special elements of strength and weakness. As the moral determinations of a man's early life change the whole course of his subsequent history, so it is with nations. By great moral crises they rise to superior influence and grandeur, or date from them the first symptoms of decline. History shows that the Divine control over the life of nations is complete. (1.) *They have their allotted span of life.* For them, too, there is a "time to be born and a time to die." They rise, flourish, and decay, and run through a strange and eventful course between the cradle and the grave. One nation after another has passed away. We have but the poor remains of their glory embalmed in history. Rome and Carthage, and mighty Babylon—where are they? The mighty past is full of the graves of

empires. Divine Providence calls a people to be a nation, and when their course is run they go down into the dust of time. They were "planted" and then "plucked up," they were gathered and then dispersed by weakness, and completely undone. (2.) *They have times of severe Providential visitations.* They are wounded as by the thrusts and stabs of some terrible fortune; they are healed again, recover strength, and live to complete their history. (3.) *They pass through the varied changes of public feeling.* In times of great public calamity they are constrained to weep and mourn; and in some great national excitement of joy they assume the proper circumstances of mirth and rapture. (4.) They have the *alternations both of prosperity and adversity.* They have their times "to get," and "to lose," "to gather," and to "cast away." (5.) They have times of *special duty.* Now, by the pressure of circumstances, or by a sense of propriety, they are forced to silence; and again, the time comes for self assertion. Hence, love and hatred, peace and war. 3. *It is illustrated in the life of Churches.* The life of the Church itself, as the Kingdom of God, survives the destruction of States and all the changes of the world; the seed of the Kingdom is imperishable. But separate Churches have histories as strange and eventful as those of the individual. (1.) They have a *fixed period of existence.* They are founded, endowed with spiritual life; and after flourishing, it may be through centuries, they die out. They are "planted" and "plucked up;" gathered as stones for a building, and, like the Temple at Jerusalem, they are scattered. Where are the Seven Churches of Asia now? Where those flourishing African Churches of the early centuries? Infidelity and superstition grow rank over the ruins of once famous Churches. Ecclesiastical systems change; they have no natural immortality. Each system will have its day. There is no miracle wrought to preserve the garments of religious thought and Church order from waxing old, and decaying through the wilderness of history. (2.) They have seasons of *manifest Divine Visitation.* There are times when God, in His dealings with His Church, compels attention. There are manifest visitations of God to His people both of anger and love. By the corruption of doctrine, and the influence of the world, by neglecting her true mission, and by prosperity, the Church is corrupted, and Divine judgments threaten, and at length fall upon her. Then is the season to weep and mourn and to rend the garments. Providence often resorts to terrible means, as if the Lord would slay His people. Then there are times of blessed visitation, when the Church is increased and prosperous; the sharp wound is healed, the season of joy and exultation has come. (3.) *They have seasons of special duty.* There are times when Churches can afford to be silent and regard the cavils and opposition of others with a lofty indifference. It is often best to maintain peace, and to allow the fury without to spend its own violence and utterly exhaust itself. But the fit time for self-assertion arrives, and the Church must carry the war into the enemies' camp. The Christian Religion itself has been the occasion of terrible conflicts, and men have kindled the flame of fierce passions upon the altar of God. The temper of the world towards the Churches of different periods varies. It is fickle and inconstant like human affection. There is for the Church, in regard to her relations with the world, a "time to love, and a time to hate." For the Church of every age there are "times and seasons which the Father hath put into His own power." They are all a portion of the eternal plan.

THE CLOCK OF DESTINY.

MORTALITY is a huge time-piece wound up by the Almighty Maker; and after he has set it a-going nothing can stop it till the Angel swears that time shall be no longer. But here it ever vibrates and ever advances—ticking one child of Adam into existence, and ticking another out. Now it gives the whirr of warning, and the world may look out for some great event; and presently it fulfils its warning, and rings in a noisy revolution. But there! as its index travels on so resolute and tranquil, what tears and raptures attend its progress! It was only another wag of the sleepless pendulum: but it was fraught with

destiny, and a fortune was made—a heart was broken—an empire fell. We cannot read the writing on the mystic cogs as they are coming slowly up; but each of them is coming on God's errand, and carries in its graven brass a Divine decree. Now, however—now, that the moment is past, we know; and in the fulfilment we can read the fiat. This instant was to say to Solomon, "Be born!" this other was to say to Solomon in all his glory, "Die!" That instant was to "plant" Israel in Palestine; that other was to "pluck him up." And thus inevitable, inexorable, the great clock of human destiny moves on, till a mighty hand shall grasp its heart and hush for ever its pulse of iron [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. In all the afflictions of the good, it is an element of consolation that the severe season will have an end, and in the great future a brighter one will arise. It is the highest prudence to await in patience God's time.

The fact that there is a Divine plan to be observed amidst all the seeming disorder of human things, is the charter of our liberty, the very foundation of our hope. Under the dominion of a wild and reckless chance, we could not walk sure-footedly in this life, nor cherish a deathless hope of better things awaiting us in the life to come.

There are atmospheres that support, and others that extinguish flame. There are beliefs that have a like effect upon the soul. Without the recognition of a superior power controlling all things, the torch of hope cannot burn.

The plan of God must be distinguished from *fate* and *destiny*. Some ancient philosophers taught that God Himself was subjected to an iron necessity, that the resistless walls of fate constrained even the Highest. We know that God is above His plan; that it is framed by Infinite Wisdom, maintained by Infinite Power, and pervaded by the Spirit of Infinite Love.

The plan of God results not from mere will, supported by a terrible and uncertain power. His will is not wilfulness, or caprice. We know what we are to expect from one who is wise and good.

The view of the machinery of the Divine Government, constructed with such infinite skill, and moved on by a terrible power, would of itself oppress and overwhelm our soul. Human nature must languish even under the contemplation of the highest regularity and order. But there is an infinite tenderness above all, and within the awful circles of wisdom and power there is a Divine bosom on which weary souls can repose, and where they are safe from fear.

Even Christ Himself became subject to the plan of God. He waited for His "baptism" and His "hour." His greatest enemies could not prevail against Him till the appointed season had come.

"Time"—"Season." 1. Consolation for the righteous in the day of trouble. They know that there will be a period to their sorrow, and that comfort and rest await them. 2. Assurance of the triumph of truth and right. He who has formed the plan of nature's vast year is the Holy One, and in the upshot of all things He will vindicate His own character. He will make the cause of the right and the true to triumph. 3. The condemnation of the false and wrong. The most rebellious will be forced at last to submission; and he who has enjoyed his fancied liberty, because judgment appeared to linger, will find that he is overtaken at last.

There is no wandering out of the reach of God's perfect knowledge, no slipping through the hands of Omnipotence. God's hand is as steady as His eye; and certainly thus to reduce contingencies to method, instability and chance itself to an unfailing rule and order, argues such a mind as is fit to govern the world [*South*].

Nothing can come from the most carefully constructed of human schemes till the pre-determined hour has struck, even if all men on earth were to put forth the most violent efforts. God will not suffer the hands of His great clock to be pointed by the kings and princes and lords of the earth [*Luther*].

The things "under heaven" have

but a time—a brief season. There is awaiting the good and the true the calm and untroubled flow of the ages of eternity.

Verse 2. There is "a time to be born," and however much a man may dislike the era on which his existence is cast, he cannot help himself: that time is his, and he must make the most of it. Milton need not complain that his lot is fallen on evil days; for these are *his* days, and he can have no other. Roger Bacon and Galileo need not grudge their precocious being, that they have been prematurely launched into the age of inquisitors and knowledge-quenching monks—for this age was made to make them. And so with the time to die. Voltaire need not offer half his fortune to buy six weeks' reprieve; for if the appointed moment has arrived it cannot pass into eternity without taking the sceptic with it. And even good Hezekiah—his tears and prayers would not have turned the shadow backward, had that moment of threatened death been the moment of God's intention [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

How immense is the difference between the circumstances of one human being and another!—and yet this is made by, what seems to us, the mere accident of birth. "This babe to be hail'd and woo'd as a Lord, and that to be shunn'd like a leper!" Thus the Supreme Power determines the "bounds of our habitation" by appointing the time and place where we shall make our entrance upon life.

Each human soul born into the world is an entirely new product. It never existed before. Matter continues the same through all changes and evolutions, but souls are strictly new. The observation of this common fact prepares the mind to accept the great mystery of creation.

To be born is—1. To enter upon scenes of life already prepared for us. The world was made ready for our habitation, and the circumstances of society were prepared for us long before we came. 2. To incur the obligation of duty. The fact that we are created by a higher Power implies a certain relation to that Power, and therefore corresponding duties. 3. To take our part in the system of Providence. We become, at birth, a part of the established order of things; we must take our place and accept our condition. 4. To enter upon a state of probation. There is another great event awaiting us, determined by the Divine decree—death. Life is the season in which the character is to be fitted for the next scene of things to which God shall call us.

The gift of Life.—1. It is a Divine gift. God alone can impart it. The breathing marble is but a figure of speech. The Spirit of God, the primal force of the universe, is "sent forth, and they are created." 2. It is a blessed gift. Our creation is the foundation of all the blessings that we can enjoy in any world. All the riches and advancement belonging to thought and feeling from hence take their rise. 3. It is an awful gift. Existence is a terrible responsibility, for we may make it an evil and a curse.

Believers and Christians know that no tyrant's sword can kill or destroy them, and that before their hour comes no creature whatever can harm them. Hence they do not trouble and worry themselves much about death, but when it comes they die unto the will of God as He pleases, like lambs and young children [*Luther*].

The busiest of mortals must find a time to die. Death has been described as "the land without any order," and, as it seems to us, without any order the King of Terrors carries off his victims. But Providence observes a fixed order. There is for every mortal course a fixed hour to close.

The time and manner of our death are to us unknown. This uncertainty is beneficial—1. On social grounds. Man, by this provision, does not end his labours till the last moment in which he can be useful to society. 2. On religious grounds. The motives for seeking God are strengthened by the uncertainty of life.

But above all, believe it, the sweetest

Canticle is *Nunc dimittis*, where a man hath obtained worthy ends and expectations. Death hath this also, that it openeth the gate to good fame, and extinguisheth envy [*Bacon*].

The time of death is one—1. Of parting from all the associations of life. Those scenes of nature and of man which had become endeared to us are rudely torn from our heart. There is a complete loss of the world. 2. Of an oppressive sense of loneliness. There is no human breast on which the parting soul can rely. The dread journey must be attempted alone, as far as human supports are concerned. 3. Of the dread of the unknown and untried. The unknown is ever the terrible.

And so there is "a time to plant." The impulse comes upon a man of fortune, and he lays out his spacious lawn, and studs it with massive trees; and he plants his garden, and in the soil imbeds the richest and rarest flowers. And that impulse fades away, and in the fickleness of sated opulence the whole is rooted up, and converted into a wilderness again. Or by his own or a successor's fall, the region is doomed to destruction; and when strangling nettles have choked the geraniums and the lilies, and, crowded into atrophy, the lean plantations grow tall and branchless, the axe of an enterprising purchaser clears away the dark thickets, and his plough-share turns up the weedy parterre [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

God has often plucked up the heathen and planted His own people. The Church is a cleared enclosure in the midst of the wilderness of the world.

The Heavenly Husbandman will pluck up every plant that is unfit for His garden.

The growths of sin and error can only flourish for a time. No advantage of situation can give them a title to continuance. The season for plucking up will come, for God must remove them out of His sight.

Verse 3. God often resorts to terrible means in order to purify His Church.

Affliction is sometimes sharp, and seems to be the prelude to death; but it is not in itself an end. God only ordains death as a passage to life. He is the Heavenly Physician who wounds but to heal.

The hurt comes before the healing, and affliction before the fruition of blessedness.

The miracles of healing performed by Our Lord contain a prophecy of what He will do as the Restorer of Paradise. He will heal all the wounds of His people, and give them life to enjoy in its best condition.

Times of healing, whether of bleeding and sick nations, of rent and distempered Churches, or wounded spirits, are in God's hand; and, till His time come, all essays of other physicians for healing are in vain; and therefore He is to be humbly employed and depended upon for that end, considering that however times of healing be fixed with Him, yet the importunity of penitents is ordinarily a comfortable forerunner of their being healed [*Nisbet*].

The most famous and enduring of works have been destroyed, and the glories of each succeeding age are often built upon the ruins of the past.

No worldly fortune so great but God can break it down, as He will for every man at death. All the works of man are doomed. Those structures alone shall abide that are raised upon the everlasting foundations.

When this life is past, there will be, for the good, an end of the succession of breaking down and building up. For them there is prepared the city which shall never be spoiled by the invader.

God builds again the walls of the Church when He grants great spiritual prosperity and increase.

In the Church's lowest condition the faithful few need not despair; the "time to build up" will come.

The progress of all human things is towards final and complete ruin. But upon these ruins God will raise everlasting habitations.

In the midst of failure and destruction, the wise may hope and take courage. Their ruined structures shall

be built again. We must fail here; but if we are one with God, we shall find all re-constructed for us on a larger plan, and with more refined elegance.

Verse 4. We cannot fix the seasons of sorrow or of joy; they are forced upon us by the decrees of Providence.

With the good, joy always comes last. Their history is a transcript of the history of Christ. He suffered first, and then entered into His glory.

The weeping of the world is but tears shed over the grave of hope; it is the anguish of despair. But the righteous weep with a sadness which takes comfort. Their darkest prospect is rounded by the glory of unfading hope.

There are seasons when the Church must hang her harp upon the willows and weep the tears of memory and long regrets; but the night of weeping shall be followed by the morning of joy.

It is best to yield to the feeling of the time, for this is the design of Providence. The children of this world try to force themselves to laughter when they ought to weep—there is a deep misery underlying their loudest joy.

Tears are, as it were, the blood of the wounds of the soul, which manifest the greatness of them; and so the light skipping of the body in dancing is but the shadow of the light and lofty flying of the mind in joy [*Jermin*].

The Lord hath His own times fixed wherein He will fill the mouths of His people with laughter, and turn their mourning into dancing by making them see the performance of those promises which they could hardly believe, healing their spiritual distempers, guarding their hearts against the vexation of affliction, giving them such sweet foretastes of their future happiness that they cannot but skip for joy, even in the midst of the worst that men can do to them. And when His time for making His people laugh and dance cometh, the world cannot hinder it [*Nisbet*].

No one can fix a date and say, I shall spend that day merrily, or I must spend it mournfully. The day fixed for the wedding may prove the day for the funeral; and the ship which was to bring back the absent brother, may only bring his coffin. On the other hand, the day we had destined for mourning, God may turn to dancing, and may gird it with irresistible gladness [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

There are extremes of joy and sorrow which must receive a corresponding expression. From their very nature, they must be of brief duration. There is an average healthy pulse for the spiritual as well as for the natural man. The soul must not be dissolved in rapture so as to give no heed to the claims of duty.

The extreme forms of human emotion show that this world is not our place of rest. Ours is not that calm and untroubled joy which the righteous look for beyond life. The Fountain of Life above is no intermittent spring.

Verse 5. Destruction and re-building—These words describe all history.—1. The history of material and social progress. This is mainly a breaking-up of institutions which have been proved a failure—no longer able to accompany the soul into higher latitudes; or it is the substitution of new methods because they are better and more potent than the old—as in skilful inventions and contrivances. 2. The history of thought. Old fashions of thinking have passed away, and new systems have been built up. And so it will be to the end, as long as the constitution of the mind is unchanged.

Human monuments cannot endure for ever. They are broken down, to be replaced by other works of taste and skill. The material progress of man requires such renewal. A like necessity exists in intellectual progress. Each age requires a new embodiment of the truth. Hence the necessity of current literature.

Christ said to the Jews, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate." It was God's house no longer. When the Church has reached this stage of corruption, the time for scattering her stones is not far off. But God cherishes

the purpose of building in the midst of this work of undoing. The glorious Christian Temple was raised upon the ruins of Judaism.

"There is a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing." There is a time when the fondness of friendship bestows its caresses, and receives them in return with reciprocal sincerity and delight: and a time when the ardour cools; when professions fail; when the friend of our bosom's love proves false and hollow-hearted, and the sight of him produces only the sigh and tear of bitter recollection. We refrain from embracing because our embrace is not returned [*Wardlaw*].

The love of God to His Church is unchangeable, but the special expressions of His love—*i.e.*, His favour, varies. The souls of the righteous are sometimes cast down as if God did not permit them always to enjoy His closest and most retired affection.

Providence has ordained it that not even in religion itself shall we have a constant rapture of delight. In the most entrancing music of the soul, there must be pauses of silence.

Verse 6. There is a time when every enterprise succeeds; when, as if he were a Midas, whatsoever the prosperous merchant touches is instantly gold. Then comes a time when all is adverse—when flotillas sink, when ports are closed, and each fine opening only proves another and a tantalising failure. And so there is "a time to keep and a time to cast away." There is a time when in the cutting blast the traveller is fain to wrap his cloak more closely around him; a time when in the torrid beam he is thankful to be rid of it. There is a time when we cannot keep too carefully the scrip or satchel which contains the provision for our journey; a time when, to outrun the pursuing assassin, or to bribe the red-armed robber, we fling it down without a scruple. It was a time to keep when the sea was smooth, and Rome's ready market was waiting for the corn of Egypt; but it was a time to cast the wheat into the sea when the angry ocean clamoured for the lives of thrice a hundred passengers [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

We have here—1. A recognition of the duty of industry. There is "a time to get." Providence calls men to active diligence in the sober pursuit of this world's good. 2. The vicissitudes of fortune. No human power can contrive that our fortunes shall be constant and unbroken. They may be undermined by the merest accident; or we may be deprived of the power to enjoy them. 3. The prudence proper in extremity. It is right carefully to preserve the results of our labour, but there are emergencies when, to serve some higher purpose, we must part with our most cherished earthly good.

That which is subject to such violent changes, and which we must be prepared to lose, cannot be our chief good. It is no part of our real selves, no lasting inheritance of the soul.

Even our life, the dearest treasure we possess, must be rendered up at the high demands of duty.

The treasures of the mind and soul are alone exempt from this inexorable law. Capricious fortune cannot force us to resign immortal wealth.

We must not attach our hearts to that which we may lose so soon.

Verse 7. There is a time when calamity threatens or grief has come, and we feel constrained to rend our apparel and betoken our inward woe; a time when the peril has withdrawn, or the fast is succeeded by a festival, when it is equally congruous to remove the symbols of sorrow. There is "a time to keep silence"—a time when we see that our neighbour's grief is great, and we will not sing songs to a heavy heart; a time when, in the abatement of anguish, a word of sympathy may prove a word in season; a time when to remonstrate with the transgressor would be to reprove a madman, or, like the pouring of vinegar on nitre, would be to excite a fiery explosion; but a time will come when, in the dawn of repentance, or the sobering down of passion, he will feel that faithful are the wounds of a friend [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Providence has ordained that great and violent griefs shall not be perpetual. The rents of sorrow are healed by time; wherefore time has been called "the comforter."

There are seasons when man must pay his tribute to nature, and assume the proper circumstances of woe. Again the season arrives when it is seemly to remove the ensigns of sorrow.

Silence should go before speech, for only in the silence of meditation can speech be wisely framed.

Silence is the proper attitude of the soul.—1. Before a great sorrow. The small griefs of men are noisy and demonstrative, but the greatest griefs are silent. They choke the utterance. 2. Before a great mystery. When words fail to give to the vast and infinite shape and outline, we can only stand and wonder and adore. In the inner shrine of religious thought we must cover our faces.

O the strong buckler of a circumspect defence, silence! O the most faithful foundation of stability! For many being well settled with a stable heart, yet unawares have fallen by the error of a wandering tongue [*St. Ambrose*].

There are some seasons wherein the Lord's people are to refrain from speaking even that which is in itself good, and might prove so to others. As 1. When we are called to learn from others (Job xxxii. 7); 2. When men turn brutish, and declare themselves incapable of profiting, and the more they are spoken to are the more enraged in their wickedness (Matt. vii. 6), and so incorrigible that others can neither have access to deal with them, nor with God for them (Amos v. 13); and, 3. When the truth hath been often before sufficiently asserted and cleared even to their conviction (Matt. xxvii. 14) [*Nisbet*].

God broke the long silence which reigned before the world was made by saying, "Let there be light." We should only break silence to speak words of quiet power, rich in the purity of truth and goodness, and tending to diffuse peace and joy.

The resulting force of one body acting upon another depends upon the angle at which it is struck. Words spoken in proper season strike the mind directly with full effective force, while those which are ill-timed can only strike with diminished power.

Seasons for speaking. 1. To give testimony for the truth. 2. To rebuke sin. 3. To comfort the afflicted. 4. To vindicate the innocent. 5. To instruct

Providence has supreme control over those actions which seem to lie most within our own power. The most refractory under Heaven's government must accept the seasons of silence and speech with the same helpless resignation as they must accept the natural seasons of the year.

Verse 8. We have no complete command over our love and hatred, for they depend upon causes beyond ourselves. They are the opposite poles of human emotion, and, like the magnetic needle, they obey the forces of attraction and repulsion.

There is a period when, from identity of pursuit, or from the spell of some peculiar attraction, a friend is our all in all, and our idolatrous spirits live and move and have their being in him; but with riper years or changing character, the spell dissolves, and we marvel at ourselves that we could ever find zest in insipidity, or fascination in vulgarity. And just as individuals cannot control their hatred and their love, so nations cannot regulate their pacifications and their conflicts. But just at the moment when they are pledging a perpetual alliance, an apple of discord is thrown in, and to avenge an insulted flag, or settle a disputed boundary, or maintain the tottering balance of power, wager of battle is forthwith joined [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

God has both the mild and the stormy passions of human nature entirely under His command.

The changes of our hearts' emotion are determined by Providence working slowly through time.

The system of Divine Providence is made up of antagonistic elements, of which each one in turn will have its brief season. If we accept the facts of

human nature as they are, we cannot expect otherwise than that wars and commotions will arise. History is but the development of the possibilities latent in man.

In the recital of the chief examples of the Divine Control, the series is concluded by the mention of peace, for this is the goal and Sabbath of all God's ways with man. The end of all the strife and agitation of this troubled year of existence is to secure eternal peace.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9—11.

Solace for the Troubled Mind.

The mind is perplexed by the difficulties of Providence—the seeming disorder of the world. Hence the heart is troubled with care—that tenacious, wasting disease of human nature. We can only seek solace in well-assured, immoveable truths. I. That all human care must be unavailing. (Verse 9.) Where are the results of all the cares, labours, and anxieties of men? When the final reckoning is made, where is the profit? The widest observation of the scene of man reveals the uselessness of care, and of the trouble of the mind at the contemplation of the antagonistic elements composing the scheme of Providence. (Verse 10.) Why is it that our care and anxiety are of no avail? 1. *Because we cannot lift the burden of vanity from man's life here.* There is a fatal disorder in the system of things in which we play so important a part. All our care cannot remove it. 2. *Because we cannot force the seasons of Providence.* We are as powerless to change these as we are to change the natural seasons of the year. We cannot be joyful when the hour for mourning arrives. All the gradual and violent changes in human things will take place despite all our care. We should, therefore, seek the solace of the inevitable, and the shelter of a love which, whatever happens, shall never fail the righteous. Weakness, ignorance, and imperfection must fall helpless into the arms of the Infinite. II. The exquisite skill of adaptation to be observed in the Divine Plan. (Verse 11.) The infinite wisdom of Providence is most to be observed in bringing forth His purpose at the fitting season. All the movements of the Supreme Governor are timed with accuracy. 1. *There is a fixed method.* There is an established order for everything which God has made, and all His purposes are exquisitely fitted to the times in which they are produced. God needs no *system* as we understand it, for this is only the refuge of imperfect minds. We need system to classify our ideas, and to make them portable for the memory. Infinite wisdom is above the necessity of this device, and can only use method. 2. *There is a fixed aim.* There is nothing purposeless in Providence, no movements at random. All is sure, steady, and accurate. Every purpose moves with sure aim to its proper end. Evil itself is made to further the good purposes of God. The well-timed order of the system of Divine Providence should be to us a comforting portion, sufficient to allay our anxiety and to assuage our sorrow. Confusion and disorder would only generate despair, for they could not conserve the good that might by chance arise; but we have everything to hope for from wise method, and fixedness of purpose and aim. If we are true and good, our deepest aspirations will have their proper season, and be brought forth in a light which will lend them a beauty and a glory. III. The inability of the human mind to compass the whole designs of Providence. (Verse 11.) No man can trace the work of God all through its mazy course. A little portion of it is before us, but the extremes of it are lost in the immensity of the past and future. 1. *We are ignorant of the whole plan of Providence.* We may indeed know a part of it. This much St. Paul teaches us is within our grasp; and from what we know, we may form a dim prophecy of what we may expect. Yet to adventure to explore the plan of God, as a whole, would take us beyond the depth of our understanding. We

only see the work of God in the course of its progress, but we cannot see the plan of it, nor the glory of the finished purpose. 2. *We are ignorant of the several ends contemplated by Providence.* We know in general that the true, the right, and the good, will be brought forth into the light and vindicated; but what other ends group themselves around these, and are intimately interwoven with the whole scheme, we know not. There must lie outside the region of our knowledge quite an infinity of possibilities of which we cannot form even the first draft, or rude outline of an idea. 3. *We are ignorant of the reasons of God's dealings.* The long dominion of evil, the afflictions of the good, the disordered mixture in the life of humanity, must be accepted as an impenetrable mystery, notwithstanding all our efforts to find a sufficient reason. God does not always answer the question of His people. "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me?" 4. *We are ignorant of the future.* We cannot tell where any purpose or work shall have its end. We cannot enter the secret chambers of heaven, and steal from thence the unpublished volumes of the Book of Providence. Men of science cannot tell the destination of the material universe in space; and where this present system of things shall end, and how it shall be disposed of in the final crash of doom, we are alike ignorant. Yet our little knowledge ought to be consolatory, and it will be so if we are only careful to assure ourselves that it *is* but a little. God reserves for Himself enough to keep our souls for ever in the attitude of adoration. We can only have peace and hope in the worship of the Highest. IV. The hopefulness inspired by a sense of the true grandeur of man. (Verse 11.) "God hath set eternity in their heart." He has placed within the soul of man a power capable of infinite expansion. These God-like properties constitute the true grandeur of man. Such a distinction conferred upon us should inspire hope, and allay anxiety. This gift comprises: 1. *The power to contemplate the Divine nature.* We cannot comprehend fully the nature of God and His dealings. They still wear the robe of mystery. Yet, because we have this great gift of eternity within us, as a disguised or pent-up force, we are able to know something of God. We could not entertain the idea of God unless He had first made us God-like by such an immense gift as this. It is our privilege to be "partakers of the Divine nature," and to partake of that nature is to know it to that degree. 2. *The pledge of immortality.* Man's destiny in the future is thus bound up with the eternity of God. The destination of spirit is to run parallel with the existence of the Supreme. The desire to live eternally is a portion of the Divine image. Only for this infinity within us, religion would be impossible, for it deals with eternal life. 3. *The capacity for unlimited improvement.* The investment of the heart with eternity is a kind of force given in elastic measure. It has reserves of power which will be developed throughout eternity. It is the property of a creature with this endowment to make progression towards a limit placed at an infinite remove. God will keep that limit still ahead of us. The soul's eye will never be permitted to approach too near to the intolerable light. We should console ourselves with reflections upon our true grandeur. However mean and obscure our present condition, we may hope for distinction and honour when we are advanced to the light of God. The heritage of the noble and the good, however obscured here by poverty and neglect, is divine in glory and duration. He who can realise that he is the heir of immortality carries with him through life's saddest journey the balm of sorrow and the ease of care.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 9. Nothing is to be reckoned the true profit or advantage of a man's work but that which is permanent, and will abide with him as nothing earthly can do. Only the graces of God's Spirit abide in the exercise of them with the saints in death, and their good works abide with them through

all eternity in the gracious reward of them [*Nisbet*].

All labour that does not increase the riches of the soul must prove profitless in the end.

Verse 10. God hath appointed the changes of time that man may be exercised in them, either wisely and willingly to His praise, or else unwillingly and foolishly to his torment and vexation [*Jermin*].

Before the hour comes, thought and labour are lost. But we are nevertheless to labour, each in his sphere and with diligence. God commands this; if we hit the hour, things prosper; if we do not, nothing comes of it, and thus no human thought avails. They, therefore, who would anticipate God's hour, struggle, and have nothing but care and sorrow [*Luther*].

It is often expedient for the teacher to allow his pupil himself to grapple with the difficulties of knowledge, for thus his mental devices are stimulated, and the true foundations of science are laid. So God gives severe exercises to man, that he may know his true position, and learn the ways of wisdom.

God does not teach us by imparting knowledge which we have but passively to receive. He sets humanity some hard exercises, which they have painfully to work out by the experience of this rough world.

No worldly position, however exalted or outwardly happy, can exempt a man from exercising his mind upon the painful problems of existence.

The path of spiritual knowledge is traced with difficulty through uncleared and tangled regions. God has laid down no "royal road."

The long processes of Divine teaching, through so many seasons of time, have their special purposes in the education of humanity.

Verse 11. Not only has God made everything, but there is a beauty in this arrangement where all is fortuitous to us, but all is fixed by Him. That season must be beautiful which to infinite love and wisdom seems the best [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Not only the works of Creation have a lustre and beauty in them, but even those works of Providence which seem blackest unto men have a great deal of ravishing beauty. Joseph's being sold, Job spoiled and plagued, Daniel in the lion's den, Christ betrayed and nailed upon the Cross—these and the like, although, being looked upon as in the hands of instruments, they seem to have nothing but deformity in them; yet, being looked upon as God's works, and according to His intent, and the result of them, they have a ravishing beauty in them, and many of His fair attributes written upon them [*Nisbet*].

The works of Providence have the prime elements of beauty—fitness and adaptation.

To know a life, we must partake of it in some degree. Unless our Creator had set "eternity in our heart," we could entertain no idea of "His eternal power and Godhead."

We have the power to discern the eternal behind this transitory scene.

Man here exists but in a mean condition. He has powers which eternity alone can unfold. The human soul is like a seed wherein unborn forests sleep.

Man findeth not out to what end all those things are done, until himself come to his end. Then he shall understand it, for either the mercy or the justice of God will show it unto him [*Jermin*].

We only see the system of Providence in the making, and not as a completed whole. Therefore we can only discern the mere rudiments of what shall be; no complete or extensive knowledge being possible to us. "The house that is a-building looks not as the house that is built," says the proverb.

We can only see, at a time, but an inconsiderable part of the ocean, so that we can never take a view of it as one great whole. In like manner the ways of God can only be seen in small portions. Their vastness overtasks our powers.

Eternity casts upon the whole course of time the shadow of mystery. We have enough light to work by, but not enough for complete revelation.

The creature of a day cannot be expected to grasp those vast designs stretching from creation to the final destiny of all things.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12—15.

The Way to Front our Destiny.

I.—By a cheerful acceptance of our Providential lot. We should wisely use the gifts of God, and rejoice in them. (Verses 12, 13.) This will give to life the smoothness of contentment, and the comfort of resignation. Such is the greatest good that we can extract from life. Whatever our lot may be, let us accept it with cheerfulness, and receive whatever good it offers. This is the wisest course for man. 1. *To fret and worry ourselves is useless.* We cannot contend with the inevitable, nor rectify the apparent perversity of things. It will be best to allow God to arrange all for us. 2. *A rebellious temper hinders the course of true happiness.* If we murmur against the appointments of God, we are only adding an unnecessary burden to life, and sending the iron of affliction deeper into the soul. Unless we have sympathy with the Supreme Ruler, all must be unpleasant to us. A sour, complaining disposition would make true happiness impossible. 3. *The power to enjoy the good of this life is the gift of God.* There may be even a refined enjoyment of life, which is not godly. But the sober and joyful use of the provisions of Providence, while keeping in mind the higher aims of existence, is a special gift of heaven. II.—By a practical recognition of the high claims of duty. "To do good in his life." (Verse 12.) This will make the appointments of Providence grateful and delightful to us. We can make even our trials and vexations the occasions of cheerful and devoted service—the school wherein our graces are refined and perfected. Thus we can maintain an heroic bearing against the hardest fate. 1. *Doing good brings a man into sympathy with the Supreme Disposer of all things.* We are thus imitating God Himself, and, in any case, this must put us into the best position. To do good is to enjoy some of the pleasures of the Highest. 2. *Whatever else may be mysterious, our present duty is always clear.* The reasons of God's dealings are obscure, and the ways of Providence seem altogether a tangled maze; but our duty is written in clear outline, quite obvious and familiar. To follow therefore what is clearly known is the surest means to lead us to further knowledge, and solution of mystery. If we are faithful to the light we have, a superior light will be granted us, in which all things will be transfigured. 3. *The faithful discharge of duty is the only lasting foundation for solid joy.* There is a joy of the world which glitters, but it is not lasting. It is like the sparkle of shallow streams as the water flows over the pebbles, or like the dispersion of it in foam. But the joy that God gives is powerful and deep. The reason is, that the only lasting joy is that which arises from a good conscience. Righteousness gives peace, and peace is the true home of joy. III.—By an acknowledgment of the inflexible rule of the Divine Government. (Verse 14.) God's ways in the government of the world are not by the method of trial and failure, by added light from experience. They are all fixed from the beginning. 1. *God's counsels are for ever.* They are sure from eternity, and cannot be set aside. This seems an iron rule only to the rebellious. The good have nothing to fear from the wise ordering of Him who is perfect in knowledge, and infinite in mercy. Such are ready with joy to front their destiny. 2. *God's counsels are so certain that they are not complicated with our human distinctions of time.* (Verse 15.) We speak of time—past, present, and future. Our weak faculties need such a device as this. But to the Infinite Intelligence "an eternal now does ever last." All things are eternally present to Him, and

with one quick glance He sees from the beginning to the end. The past lives now—the future is already here. IV.—By recognising the righteous ends contemplated by the Divine Government. (Verses 14, 15, latter part.) There are certain ends which the Supreme Ruler proposes to Himself in His administration. These are of a practical nature; they relate to human conduct, and as such are revealed. The methods of the Divine Government are designed—1. *To tame and subdue the heart of man.* Men are "to fear before Him." This want of mastery over the future tends to bring man to submission. He is convicted of ignorance, and the pride of knowledge is abated. He can never presume to be the God of God when his rebellion is proved to be a vain and hopeless attempt, and the future is kept in terrible reserve. The only sane result of the contemplation of the ways of Providence is resignation, humility, and the fear of God. It is madness for a man to dash his head against the iron walls of destiny. The course of Providence in the world is the great tamer of the human breast. 2. *To vindicate the wrongs of His people.* That which has fled away, and seemed to have escaped altogether, God will summon to His presence again. He will cause the great gulf of time to deliver up all that is in it. The past ages of wrong shall be called up again—reviewed and judged. Men think when they have persecuted the righteous that all is done with. They have silenced the testimony of truth. They have triumphed over the meek. But the end will come, and a day of reckoning, when the wrongs and oppressions of the past shall utter their voice, emphatic, decisive, and terrible. The Christian knows that his "Vindicator" liveth—that the time must come when all wrongs shall be adjusted, and all precedency set right.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 12. There is no lasting good in the things of this life; yet a joyful heart lends a beauty and grace to those fading and vanishing delights.

Doing good should always go hand in hand with joy; because good deeds spring from love, and joy is but the recreation of love.

Duty is the watchword of humanity, the herald of progress, the pledge of final emancipation. In the confusion and general uproar of things that amaze our ears, the voice of duty is clearly heard, and calls us to the skies.

When good actions become pleasant to us, then joy is the very sinews of duty.

Active goodness and joy are God-like properties, for He is the unwearied worker of good, and the Blessed One.

They whose hearts are cheered by the proofs of the Lord's bounty in His dealing with them, and do express that cheerfulness by their activity in duties that may honour Him; they have found that true good which is attainable in this life [*Nisbet*].

Verse 13. The purest earthly joys are those which are won by toil. What we passively receive stirs up only a languid feeling. The idle and luxurious blunt the edge of joy.

It requires peculiar skill to use creature comforts wisely and well. This power is the gift of God.

The means of our common sustenance are turned into manna by a joyful spirit, and the remembrance of the giver.

When the gifts of God are not cheerfully acknowledged and enjoyed, our table becomes a snare.

Verse 14. As the omnipotency of God is without defect, so the counsel of God is without change. For how can there be any change in Him to whom nothing is past, or to come, but all things are present? [*Jermin.*]

Men form opinions which change in the different situations of the mind through the course of time. It has been said that opinion is but knowledge

in the making. It is but provisional where absolute certainty cannot be attained. But the thoughts of God stand "to all generations."

The whole scheme of an Oriental court, and eminently that of the Great King, was laid out on the idea that it was the visible representation of the court of heaven, and the king himself a visible incarnation of the highest God. The sense of this speaks out in every arrangement, in the least, as in the greatest, and is the key to them all. Thus, the laws of that kingdom, when once uttered, could not be reversed or changed (Dan. vi. 8), because the king who gave them was the incarnation of God, and God cannot repent, or alter the thing which has gone out from His lips [*Trench*].

The thought of the perfection of God's plan raises our admiration, but, at the same time, inspires a wholesome fear. There is behind all a mysterious and terrible power which we may well fear to offend.

Fear should be the instrument of caution, and the sentinel of loving obedience.

The works of God are so perfect that no improvement can be made, and, left to themselves, they will be perpetual. How true is this regarding God's greatest work — redemption! What more could He have done to make it a great salvation than what He has already done? Or what feature of the glorious plan could we afford to want? And now that He has Himself pronounced it a "finished" work, what is there that man can put to it? What is there that he dare take from it? And in doing it He has done it "for ever" [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Verse 15. In all the seeming irregularities of Divine Providence, there are fixed principles which are never departed from. And thus it is that a science of history is possible. So certain is God's method of procedure, that though we know not the special events of the future, we can predict the results of great principles.

The future will be but a repetition of the past. Thus the course of humanity through time may be likened to the movements of the solar system. The planets run their fixed cycles, and go over the same paths again. Yet there is with all these movements another by which the whole system is itself travelling in space. So human history, though revealing a perfect sameness from age to age, may yet be travelling towards some certain goal.

The deeds of oppression, cruelty, and wrong have not passed away for ever. God will seek them out again, and measure their deserts. The persecutors of the righteous cannot hide themselves even in the abyss of time.

The Impotence of Time.

Time has not done much, notwithstanding all; "for that which hath been is now." This language will apply—I. To all the elements of material existence. The forms of the material world are constantly changing, but the elements, of which the first types of all were formed, are the same. The raw materials, out of which the principle of life constructs its organs, and weaves its garments from age to age, are always here. Time, through all its mighty revolutions, cannot destroy an *atom*. II. To all the spirits of mankind. All human souls that ever have been are now. Not one of the mighty millions who spent his short and misty day of life under these heavens is lost. All are thinking, feeling, acting, still. Their bodies are dust, but their bodies were theirs, not *they*; their instruments, not themselves.

"Distinct as is the swimmer from the flood,
The lyrist from his lyre."

III. To all the general types of human character. All the varieties of human character may be traced to five or six different regal sympathies. There is *the inordinate love of pleasure, the undue love of gain, the vain love of show, the mere love of inquiry, the inordinate love of power, the false love of religion, the holy love of God.* All these great types of character have been here almost from the earliest dawn of history. Herods and Hamans, Athenians and Pharisees, seem to be living again in every age. IV. To all the principles of the Divine Government. All the principles by which both the physical and moral provinces have been controlled from the beginning are the same now as ever. Harmony with God's laws is the creature's highest destiny. Rebellion against them is his inevitable ruin. They neither pause nor change, either for angels or men. V. To the grand design of all things. This must ever be the holy development of creature-minds in gratitude, reverence, love, and assimilation to Himself. VI. To the

recollections of the human memory. Memory gathers up every fragment of all "that hath been," so that none may be lost. The history of man is recorded, not in books, but in souls. VII. To all the conditions of man's well-being. *Physical, intellectual, spiritual* [*Homilist*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 16—18.

Corruption in the Seat of Justice.

I. It is a manifest and daring iniquity. History gives a sad recital of deeds of oppression and wrong done in the sacred name of justice. Power and place have been abused to serve the basest passions of human nature. This is a manifest and daring form of impiety. 1. *Rulers and judges are in the place of God.* Human law has for its chief object the preservation of order, the securing of the best conditions of national prosperity, and the guardianship of public morality. Those who administer the law stand in the place of God, who is the fountain of all law and authority. When these abuse their position, a Divine idea is perverted and dishonoured. A lofty principle of the Divine Government is subjected to a degrading parody. Such a sin is a daring insult to the majesty of Heaven. 2. *When they are corrupt, the worst evils follow.* The streams of social life are poisoned, the innocent are without defence, and the restraints of wickedness are slackened or broken. But one great evil that follows is the oppression of the righteous. The Church has often come into conflict with the civil power, and the good have been persecuted in the name of law and justice. II. It is a source of discipline for the righteous. Like other evils, this is overruled by Providence, and made to serve the purposes of discipline. 1. *It serves to develop spiritual character.* (Verse 18.) It manifests what is in men. It marks off the brutish part of mankind from those who are moved by high principle and noble aspirations. The good, under every oppression and injury, have the support of conscience—they are strong in integrity. Affliction does but fetch out the hidden lustre of their graces. 2. *It serves to cure radical evils in the Church of God.* Times of outward ease and prosperity for the Church have some special dangers, the chief of which is pride—a vice easily forced into bloom by the warmth of prosperity; but soon nipped by the keen blasts of adversity. 3. *It serves to show to what baseness human nature may come, apart from Divine influence.* (Verse 18.) "They themselves." Having quenched the Divine light within them, and all better hopes and feelings, some men have become monsters of injustice, and degraded themselves to the level of beasts. In times of persecution, when deeds of cruelty and slaughter have their sanction from the seat of justice, it is difficult to believe that men capable of such fierce brutality have immortal souls. It seems easier to believe that men are but beasts, after all, to be tamed for pleasure, or destroyed for sport. III. It tends to ripen the world for Divine Retribution. God cannot allow the misuse of the most sacred gifts to go on for ever. Judgment may be delayed, but it will come at last. 1. *Our spiritual instincts call for such an interference.* There is something within every righteous soul which is prophetic of the time when all the present moral confusion and disorder shall have an end. Christ is the hope of all the oppressed ones—Himself their chief in affliction. The world once looked upon the picture of Herod in purple on the throne, and the purest and loveliest of humanity crucified between two thieves; but the day is coming when the universe shall look upon another picture, wherein shall be a sad reversal. 2. *The character of God teaches us to expect it.* He is wise, just, and holy, and (though the process to us seems slow) He will maintain the honour of His name. He must make a separation between the righteous and the wicked—thus He will judge *both.* (Verse 17.) 3. *The appeal of the oppressed from earth to heaven will be heard.* (Verse 17.) "A time *there.*" The Royal Preacher, as it were, points from the seat of unrighteousness with his lifted finger to heaven—the home of justice. "There"—such is the answer of the persecuted, and the only answer which many souls in their dumb agony could give.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 16. The advancement of men to places of power and trust in the world, who abuse the same to the oppression of piety and equity, and the promoting of ungodliness and injustice, is a dispensation that, of any other, the Lord's people had most need to be guarded against stumbling at, and taught how to judge aright of; seeing Satan takes occasion from thence to tempt to corruption of the best to Atheism, or denial of a Providence (Isa. xl. 27), and to join with such men in their sinful ways (Psa. lxxiii., 10, 13) [*Nisbet*].

Wickedness is too obvious and manifest—too weak by itself to succeed. It has to assume the forms of goodness. Hence under the pretence of justice the vilest wrongs have been inflicted.

Corruption in the seat of justice tends —1. To confuse all moral distinctions. 2. To put to sore trial minds of wavering principle and unstable virtue. 3. To disorganise the frame of society. 4. To retard social progress.

The wisest and best of mankind have suffered fearful evils under the mockery of a trial. Even Christ Himself went from a human judgment-seat to His Cross.

Place and authority do not ensure the integrity of those who possess them. Some of the worst names in history have held the most exalted positions.

The throne which Solomon made was overlaid with the most pure gold; and what did this signify but the esteem and price in which God would have justice to be held, as also how pure the judgments should be that from thence are given? But too often where the seat is gold, he that sits on it is brass; where the place is the place of judgment and righteousness, wickedness and iniquity are found [*Jermin*].

Verse 17. The world has a terrible account of injustice and wrong to answer for. God will yet have a reckoning with the children of men.

God is just, though by the impenetrable clouds of Providence that justice may for awhile be hidden. He will clear the scene in the end, and spurn from His presence every form of evil.

The true and good who have been wronged here shall take their case before a higher court.

With two worlds in which to outwork the retribution, and with a whole eternity to overtake the arrears of time, oh! how tyrants should fear for God's judgments!—and that match which themselves have kindled, and which is slowly creeping round to explode their own subjacent mine, in what floods of repentance, if wise, would they drench it! [*Dr. J. Hamilton.*]

The vindication of the righteous is as much a proper work of judgment as the condemnation of the sinner. The Avenger is afoot, and will yet overtake all oppressors.

The judgment of God will yet repair all the wrongs of time.

At the sight of the worst oppressions and wrongs, our soul instinctively fastens upon the idea of the judgment, and points to the lofty throne of eternal justice.

As there is a time for every purpose and work, so there will be a time when all things shall be ripe for Divine judgment.

Verse 18. For a moment the Royal Preacher felt relief in recalling the future judgment. But what care they for the judgment? So brutish are they that they neither look forward nor look up, but are content with their daily ravin. Yes, beasts, I half believe you. Your grossness almost converts me to your own materialism. I wish that God would manifest you to yourselves, and show you how brutish you are living, and how brute-like you will die [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Times of misrule and injustice manifest character by affording scope for human malignity, or by giving opportunity for the integrity of high principle to assert itself.

In human nature, how often the animal has surmounted the rational! Men have made themselves beasts by indulgence in animal pleasures, by their cruelty and rage, and by extinguishing the sense of immortality.

The evil of some is disguised and restrained by circumstances. It wants only a fit opportunity for their vices to attain a maturity of corruption.

Wicked men may see that the dispensations of God, even the most grievous, may contribute much for their good, if they make a right use thereof; for while He is manifesting them to the world, they ought to think that it is done "that they may see themselves to be beasts," and so may loathe themselves, and thank Him that they are not destroyed, but preserved that they may seek mercy, and a change of their nature [*Nisbet*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 19—22.

The Doubt of Immortality.

There are times when the most assured truths are questioned. The Royal Preacher assumes the sceptic, and allows the appearances of things to cast on him the dismal shadow of doubt. I. This doubt may arise from the identity of the outward conditions both of man and the lower animals. In the features of their physical existence, they are so much alike that one may be tempted to predict for them a common fate—total extinction at death. 1. *They appear to be both alike under the dominion of chance.* (Verse 19.) "Befalleth"—*i.e.*, they are mere chance, in the sense of being subject to it. They have not the free determination of their own lot. We apply the term *chance* to describe those occurrences whose causes are obscure. Those things upon which life mostly depends are wholly out of the power alike of men and beasts. They both appear to be the sport of innumerable chances. 2. *Both are informed by the same principle of life.* (Verse 19.) "One breath." In the essential qualities of physical life, our nature can boast no pre-eminence. The beasts, like ourselves, are supported by the products of the earth, and draw the vital air. They follow the same analogy of physical construction. They are liable to disease, danger, and accident. 3. *They have both the same origin and destiny.* As far as outward appearance is concerned, no difference can be detected in the two extremes of their existence. They all come from the dust, and return to the dust again. II. This doubt is strengthened by our complete ignorance of a future life. (Verse 21.) We may, indeed, speak of the spirit of man going "upward," and the spirit of the beast going "downward," yet the difference is too subtle to be easily discerned. "Who knoweth?" In the absence of any certain information, who can make a positive assertion? 1. *We have no experience of a superior life for man.* Knowledge does increase through ages, but humanity has gathered no experience of any life beyond this world. No one has returned from the other shores of life to tell the mysterious secret. The eternal silence of the grave strengthens doubt. 2. *Human reason is powerless to give us any assurance of such a life.* Reason may give us probable grounds for believing that there may be such a destiny for man, but it cannot give us a certainty. We may reason ourselves, almost with equal facility, into a belief for or against immortality. And in the similarity of the fates both of men and beasts, it is hard to discover the difference. There are times when the sense of immortality is not strong. 3. *Some have accepted materialism as a doctrine.* The blank ignorance of man upon the subject, together with appearances, have led them to adopt the dismal creed of hopeless extinction in the grave. Consider the wail of despair which marks some of the ancient poetry. St. Paul tells us the heathen had "no hope." The very existence of doubt implies that there is some evidence on the other side of the question. III. This doubt ought not to interfere with the enjoyment of the present. In

the darkest seasons of doubt, there are some manifest duties. Whatever be our fate when life is ended, some clear path lies before us now. Man can enjoy his portion. 1. *The present life affords scope for such enjoyment.* No one thought, however tremendous or awful it may be, can ever be present to the mind. The short tenure of existence here, the dread certainty of death, does not prevent mankind from enjoying the present world. 2. *No other arrangement will be made for man in this life.* (Verse 22.) "That is his portion;" when he has once departed from life, he cannot enjoy it again. Each life is a measured portion once for all. 3. *We are unable either to command or to look into the future.* A man cannot tell what shall be after him, even in his own immediate circle. He cannot shape the future according to his own views or wishes. It is vain for a man to trouble himself much regarding that over which he can have no command, and which is hopelessly concealed from him.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 19. If one questioned the eyes and judgment without listening to the Word of God, human life would appear to be governed by mere chance to such an extent that men would seem to be, as it were, like a great ant-hill, and like ants to be crushed. But the revelation of the Divine Word must be placed in contrast with this appearance [*Melanchthon*].

In building up the science of material things we learn to correct appearances —the reports of sense—by the convictions of reason. So the dark and melancholy appearances of life around us must be corrected by the light of faith.

On this, the human side of life, all is seeming confusion, as if chance and accident held dominion. He who looks no further has sufficient occasion for doubt and denial. We cannot see life clearly unless we see it in God's light.

The anatomist can only examine the structure of the organs of physical life. The immortal creature cannot be investigated by the scalpel.

The sense discovers, both in man and beast, the same wave of life beating to and fro. He who only regards the physical part of our nature may believe, without difficulty, that the same dark fate is reserved for both.

Verse 20. The lowly origin and destiny of the material part of our nature should be—a motive for humility—a rebuke to arrogance—a reason for seeking the imperishable.

It is but one place, there be no upper and lower places in death; but how different soever the places of men may be while they lived, when they die, they are all in the same place; yea, beasts are in the same place with the wisest, the richest, and the greatest men. And there indeed is their journey's end [*Jermin*].

All that live are borne onwards by an irresistible decree, from dust to dust

The degradation to which our physical nature must come when life is ended is a sore trial to faith. It seems as if we lose existence then. Faith, in seeking to grasp eternal life, has, after all, to leap a precipice.

Verse 21. Man's superior destiny in the great future, is a truth not unattainable, yet still difficult to be known. It has been hid from many, and by others has been obscured by sensuality, and devotion to this present world.

The common eye cannot trace human existence beyond the last scene of all. The image of God's immortality stamped upon man cannot be discerned on this side of life, yet faith gets a glimpse thereof as reflected in the mirror of God's word.

The philosophers were much turmoiled and very busy in seeking after the nature of the soul. Tertullian describes them as in a wood, wherein if they saw any light of truth, it is only glimpses of it through the thick trees of ignorance and errors; and wherein

if any shall seek for the truth, he shall seek it in a wood. Surely there is no better manifester of the soul than He who is the Maker of it, and that is God Himself [*Jermin*].

Can anything be more marvellous or startling, unless we were used to it, than that we should have a race of beings about us whom we do but see, and as little know their state, or can describe their interests or their destiny, as we can tell the inhabitants of the sun and moon? We have more real knowledge about the angels than about the brutes. They have apparently passions, habits, and a certain accountableness, but all is mystery about them. We do not know whether they can sin or not, whether they are under punishment, whether they are to live after this life . . . Is it not plain to our senses that there is a world inferior to us in the scale of beings, with which we are connected without understanding what it is? [*J. H. Newman.*]

Verse 22. Only the moment that we live in life is our possession. Every hour lived sinks irrevocably into the sea of the past; the future is uncertain. Therefore is he a fool who lets the present slip by unused, wastes it in vain amusement, or grieves with useless lamentations [*Wohlfarth*].

It is our duty to do the best with that which lies to hand, and not consume ourselves with vain longings after an ideal state. We must accept the conditions of our earthly existence as a fact, and we ought to lighten their burden by the spirit of joy.

With a firm conviction of the duty which the present demands, the tasks of life, though in themselves grievous, may be set to the music of the soul.

No second lease of life will be granted us. We should therefore act well in the present, so that we might await with confidence the mysterious crown of eternity.

The future is all uncertain. We cannot forecast history; or, to come closer home, that smaller portion of it interwoven with our own life and labours. Yet we may be assured that if we are good and true, the future hides nothing in it that can vanquish or distress us.

Within the vague and solemn mystery which rounds our little life here, there is yet some room for cheerfulness, contentment, and hope.

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. So I returned.**] Passing from the reflections of the last chapter to a new subject of contemplation. *They had no comforter* The repetition of this phrase is intended to make the thought emphatic. **4. Every right work.**] Every work marked by excellence and skill. But the writer has chiefly in view that successful work which excites the envy of others. **5. Eateth his own flesh.**] Accomplishes his own ruin by indolence, exhausts his fortune, preys upon himself like one mad with hunger. **10. If they fall.**] Not both together, but if one or the other falls. **12. A threefold cord.**] Two cords would only suggest plurality, but three give the idea of strength. **13. Better is a poor and a wise child.**] Not in the moral point of view, but happier—better off. **14. For out of prison he cometh to reign.**] Reference is made to the youth mentioned in the previous verse. The writer may have had the history of Joseph in his mind. *Born in his kingdom becometh poor.* Came to the possession of his kingly dignity by birth. His dethronement is the condition of the sudden elevation of this youth. **15. All the living which walk under the sun, with the second child.**] The great number of the adherents of this upstart who has seized the throne.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—3.

The Tyranny of Force against Right.

I. Such tyranny is an immense evil. 1. *It is an old evil.* From the days of Cain, who did the first murder, there have been tyrants who have used their power to oppress the innocent. Brute force, without the government of the reason and conscience, employed to crush the defenceless, is one of the earliest forms of human iniquity. 2. *It is an inveterate evil.* Since Abel's murder, the oppressors and the oppressed have been the chief actors in history. In every age, might has prevailed over right. No nation can show a clear page, purged from this blot. Humanity has become so indoctrinated with the claims of mere power that armies are still called "forces." Even now, society is not advanced enough to render supreme homage to reason and moral right. Still the ultimate appeal of nations is to force. **II. Such tyranny gives rise to extreme suffering.** The innocent may be strong in the sense of right, and in the defence of conscience; still human nature must feel. 1. *These sufferings open the fountains of sorrow.* When courage, goodness, and skill are of no avail against a vicious power; when the innocent are trampled under by the iron heel of tyranny, no wonder that the eye fills, and the heart is overwhelmed with emotion. 2. *These sufferings are sometimes aggravated by the circumstance that they have no earthly comforter.* The good have often been alone in the sorrows inflicted by the oppressor, and have looked around in vain for a sympathetic heart. With no eye to pity, and no heart to cheer, the load of misery comes with crushing weight. **III. Such tyranny causes existence to seem but a questionable benefit.** The long record of human agony produced by the tyranny of the powerful; the cruel persecutions of some of the brightest ornaments of human nature—these things are a sore trial to our faith in the goodness of the Supreme Power. It seems as if God were indifferent to the most grievous wrongs of men. The existence of such evils in the world tempts a man to indulge in the most extravagant and desperate language. 1. *He affirms that the dead are better off than the living.* (Verse 2.) The thought of the wrongs which man inflicts on man so sickens the heart that we are plunged into that gloomy mood in which we are ready to hail the condition of the dead, and welcome the long sleep and the safe shelter of the grave. There are deeds so horrible that the contemplation of them is enough to make us loathe life. 2. *That the gift of existence is itself an evil.* (Verse 3.) There are seasons when the contemplation of the darker side of history so occupies the mind that we are tempted to regard the gift of life itself as a doubtful blessing. We almost wish as if our eye had never opened to the light of day, and that we had never been called from that dark negation which we once were. A state of non-existence appears to us preferable to a state of ill-existence. 3. *There are times when this melancholy thought presses itself with peculiar force upon the mind.* Times in the individual life—times in the life of nations. The state of mind, however, here described, does not and cannot last. Though the soul may have to pass through this shadow, she emerges into the light of a better hope. Elsewhere the Royal Preacher praises life as a Divine gift. Our feeling regarding the wrongs of time is thus modified by the higher truths, and the belief in eternal justice.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Grace, while fortifying the soul against the violence of trouble, does not seal up the fountains of nature.

A tear is often the only tribute that the oppressed can give to misery.

The tears of the oppressed are—1. A dumb protest against the cruel might

of wrong. 2. An appeal to the justice of Heaven. 3. A revelation of an eternal future.

The pious, in the fiercest trial, though all men may forsake them, have yet a Comforter at their side.

Society has not yet reached that stage of progress wherein the convictions of reason and conscience bear supreme rule. Notwithstanding the advance of knowledge, and the presence of the Christian Religion for so many ages, humanity is still far from this ideal perfection.

A mechanical force is of no service to man unless he can guide and direct it to certain ends. There are some forces of nature of great potentiality, but they are like wild beasts that cannot be tamed. Power needs the direction of goodness to make it venerable, and worthy of praise.

The world has not yet got beyond the illusion of military glory—a proof that the worship of force has not yet disappeared from amongst us.

The Lord has a bottle, and into that bottle he puts His people's tears, and the tears of all who are oppressed. When Joseph wept at Dothan, and the Jews at Babylon, it was not the sand of the desert, nor the stream of Euphrates, which intercepted the tear, but God's bottle. . . . And whether it be the scalding tear of the Southern Slave, or that which freezes in the Siberian exile's eye, God's bottle has received them all; and when the measure is full, the tears of the oppressed burst in vials of vengeance on the head of the oppressor [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

The power of the oppressor is, after all, a mere shadow—a vanishing thing. The power most to be dreaded is that which is on the side of the oppressed. He who has taken refuge in the citadel of God is the most terrible foe.

Verse 2. When one attentively regards the innumerable sorrows of the heart, miseries, great evils, and troubles on earth, and the awful wickedness there is in the world, which is the devil's kingdom, one must surely be of the mind that it were better to be dead than to see so much wretchedness [*Luther*].

There are such sights of misery on earth, that in the confusion of his feeling, the spectator finds a momentary relief in thinking upon the dread repose and secure refuge of the dark house.

The dead are clean escaped from the hands of the tyrant. The door of the sepulchre for ever bars the entrance of revenge.

Verse 3. In certain frames of the feeling, it is natural to wish for the condition of non-existence. Extreme sorrow has plunged some of the best men into this trial—Job—Jeremiah.

When life seems so poor a heritage, the true and Absolute Being becomes all to us.

The tribulation through which we must enter into the Kingdom of Heaven may consist of temptations to indulge the most extravagant and vain wishes.

There are times when we seem to snatch a consolation from the dreariest of all philosophies.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. *Verses* 4—6.

THE PENALTIES OF SUCCESS.

We have here the case of a man who has escaped many ills and disasters of life. His work has led to a successful issue. Such a man may be regarded as comparatively happy, yet society fixes certain penalties upon his condition. I. The successful man is often a mark for the envy of others. (Verse 4.) The world idolizes success, and gives credit to the man who has achieved it for deep contrivance and many virtues. Yet success has some drawbacks and disadvantages. It often draws upon itself the envy of others. But 1—*This envy is unjust.* Society should bow cheerfully to the condition by which a man enjoys

the fruit of his labour. The success of another should not be a huge object casting a dark shadow upon our own portion. Yet the language of Haman is that of most men (Esther v. 13). 2. *This envy brings many evils in its train.* The envious man may be tempted to ruin the successful, to attack his reputation, or to depreciate his work. Hence arise various forms of low cunning and deceit. The first murder had its bitter root in envy. 3. *This envy is worthless.* "This also is vanity," ending in no good result for those who indulge it—a consuming fire in the breast. 4. *This envy is unwise.* In the proper ordering of human society, the wise and the good should rule, and come to place and power. Even in the present disorder, it often happens that talent and virtue are rewarded with success. But envy has prevented many a man from occupying his proper place, and thus the progress of society is retarded. II. The successful man has no unmixed enjoyment. He is above the reach of many evils, and has much to make him happy. Yet his lot is not pure and unmixed joy. He has much to chafe his affections—to worry and distract his mind. "Vexation of spirit" is also his portion. This may arise from the fact—1. *That the skill he has shown meets with such an ungrateful return.* He has been remarkable for industry and wisdom, and, it may be, has exerted himself for the public good; yet, for all his pains, he is only made the mark of envy. Ingratitude has often been the sad and vexatious heritage of some of the bravest and best workers. 2. *That the evil affections of mankind are so far beyond the reach of remedy.* All the efforts and reforms of the wisest can never eliminate the feeling of envy from mankind. Men are ever prone to envy that successful work in which they have taken no part. III. The work of the successful man is often depreciated by the indolent. The slothful man is described as working his own ruin. (Verse 5.) He cannot endure to witness the success of men of greater talents and energy than himself. Hence he assumes the features of wisdom, and counsels moderation. (Verse 6.) Why all this labour for so little result? It is better to manage life with sobriety than to gain success at the expense of proper repose. 1. *This counsel is given by men who are the least ready to do any good work themselves.* The idle man folds his hands, and calls that work useless which he cannot imitate, either from natural or moral unfitness. He waits for miracles, and expects the end without the means. 2. *This counsel possesses an element of wisdom.* It is not altogether foolish and vain advice, but has in it some features of truth. It is better to secure a little, and to enjoy it, than to aim at too much; and thus to purchase success by the loss of happiness and quiet. To cultivate contentment, and to cool the fever of ambition, should be the aim of every wise man. 3. *This counsel is wrong in its extreme form.* Men must have large aims if they would perform great and lasting works. A low and mean ideal cripples the energies of the soul. Every true man must have a purpose wider than himself.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 4. Envy is opposed to that expansive charity which rejoices in the success of another. Like love, it is not an intermittent, but a constant passion; thus it frets and consumes the possessor

The trail of the serpent Envy is traced across every earthly paradise.

"Envied of his neighbour," nay of his father-in-law for did not this make Saul to envy David, so that David flying to Achish had rather be under an enemy than under envy; nay, of his brother, when there was but one brother in the world [*Jermin*].

No man so secure in the peaceful results of his honest labour and skill as to be beyond the reach of the archers of envy.

Even he who gains the applause of men obtains a tribute often impaired by envy.

When a statue had been erected by

his fellow-citizens of Thasos to Theagenes, a celebrated victor in the public games of Greece, we are told that it excited so strongly the envious hatred of one of his rivals, that he went to it every night, and endeavoured to throw it down by repeated blows, till at last, unfortunately successful, he was able to move it from its pedestal, and was crushed to death beneath it on its fall. This, if we consider the self-consuming misery of envy, is truly what happens to every envious man. He may perhaps throw down his rival's glory; but he is crushed in his whole soul beneath the glory which he overturns [*Dr. T. Brown*].

Verse 5. Idleness makes a desert of the mind; multiplies the snares of temptation; and ends in self-destruction.

He who does not keep his powers in a state of healthy activity will find that they waste away. This is true of the physical, moral, and spiritual.

The difficulty of accomplishing successful work, and the envy it raises in others, should not cause us to fold our hands in indolence.

The purest pleasures are those which are won by exertion—the sweet rewards of toil. He who folds his hands tastes not the honey of life, but consumes himself with long regrets and imaginary fears.

Verse 6. We may conceive that, as in the verse before, Solomon showeth his misery in his wasted estate; so here he showeth his misery in a plentiful estate. He who laboureth and getteth but a little, yet by labour hath a quiet mind free from a burdensome tediousness, is to be preferred before him [*Jermin*].

There is in human life a certain golden mean in which the greatest happiness can be enjoyed.

A competence with quietness is to be preferred to abundance with all its necessary train of anxieties and cares.

This speech can be put into the mouth either of a fool or of a wise man, for it has elements which suit both characters. As uttered by a fool, it springs from envy. It is the affectation of wisdom, used to despise the work of another. But as spoken by a wise man, it is a sober counsel to hit the happy medium between absolute indolence and that restless activity which pushes enjoyment out of life.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—12.

PORTRAIT OF A MAMMON WORSHIPPER.

Instead of using the gifts of fortune wisely, and gaining favour with mankind, some only increase their misery by depriving life of its proper happiness. Here is the picture of a man who is possessed by the spirit of avarice—a worshipper of Mammon. Of such an one, we may say:—I. That his conduct is unreasonable (Verse 8.) He has no "child," nor "brother;" no relation to care for, and yet he toils after money with restless anxiety, as if life itself depended upon it. This conduct is unreasonable. 1. *It surpasses the proper bounds of prudence.* Prudence ought to govern all conduct. A man should be diligent in work, striving to build for himself a defence against the storms of adversity. But when this passes to the extreme of greediness and grasping, so that a man forgets his own happiness to serve a base passion, his conduct is unreasonable. 2. *The folly of it is sometimes apparent to himself.* There are times when the voice of awakened reason within the avaricious man proclaims his folly. A better spirit possesses him for awhile, and he asks, "For whom do I labour?" &c. He feels, during this momentary fit of wisdom, that his conduct is utterly without useful purpose. He cannot spend all upon himself. He has no relations, and has made no friends. He wilfully deprives himself of happiness. 3. *It is conduct which does violence to*

calm conviction, and to the tenderest feelings of nature. It is the nature of avarice to increase in fearful proportion, growing by what it feeds on. The more a man has, the more he covets. Avarice leads a man to trample rudely upon the charities of life; his whole heart withers, all his affections are resolved into one base passion. To love wealth for the sake of the power it gives, is capable of some defence from reason; but to love it for its own sake is the height of folly. II. That he is condemned to suffer the distress of a cold and cheerless isolation. He has no relatives, but he might have made friends. He has not a "Second," but is left all alone. His supreme selfishness has repelled all hearts. 1. *This comes from the retribution of society.* He who does not love cannot be beloved. Society, in the matter of the affections of love or hatred, gives measure for measure. 2. *It is self-inflicted.* There is no necessity that it should be thus. A man can make himself friends by means of his wealth. Good deeds secure the gratitude of others—they bind heart to heart. The avaricious man may command men by his wealth, but he is obeyed without love. To live to self, is to die to all that is dear and precious in life. It is moral suicide. III. That he is deprived of the true enjoyment of life. Social life has pleasures which are sought for in vain in selfish solitude. 1. *The participation of others in our joy serves to increase it.* (Verse 11.) Superior joys are not impoverished by giving. The communication of knowledge to another does not decrease our own store; and in pleasing others, we lose nothing ourselves. He who will not share his joy with other breasts, must be content to see his own joy dwindle away. 2. *Neglect of the social principle can only produce unhappiness.* We were made for society, and there only can our happiness reach to any tolerable development. Beasts may herd together, but only men can *live* together. Selfishness is a breach of the natural laws of society, and the penalty is a blank and gloomy solitude. IV. That he is deprived of proper protection. He who by his selfishness brings himself into a condition of barbarous solitude, suffers many disadvantages. If he has made a friend, he has the joy and satisfaction of a mutual reward of labour. (Verse 9.) But in a state of isolation, he loses this, with all other advantages that are derived from companionship. 1. *He is deprived of the protection of wise counsel.* There are events in life which greatly perplex the judgment, and the mind of the exercised man is so confused by the circumstances in which it is placed, that it fails to be a safe guide. Hence the importance of wise counsel. Another mind coming fresh to the subject is able to suggest some wise directing ideas, and to place the difficulty in a more hopeful light. 2. *He is deprived of timely aid in danger.* He who has a companion when he falls, has one to help him. A man may fall, tripped by some snare of temptation, or overwhelmed by sudden calamity; and his state is desolate indeed if he has made no friend who can give him timely aid, and lift him up again. 3. *He is deprived of the protection of sympathy in joy and sorrow.* When men can feel together both on the joyful and mournful occasions of life, the gladness is intensified, and the force of the sorrow abated. There is a genial warmth in sympathy which secures a large comfort, and preserves a man from perishing in the severe season of trial. (Verse 11.) 4. *He is deprived of the defence of a large and compact friendship.* (Verse 12.) If he has two, or more to help him in the hour of need, so much the better. With a large fellowship, his defence is made stronger, and the enemy overawed and confounded. To despise the social compact is unnatural; it is unwise, and ends in unmitigated misery. The heart's affections of the mammon worshipper are so completely given to the idol he adores, that he has nothing left in him responsive to the kind charities of life.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 7. As the vain and sinful courses which men take for happiness in this earth are so many and various that, let a diligent observer turn himself

never so often to what hand he will, he shall always see more and more of them—so those who would promote the work of mortification in their own hearts ought to search them all out, and study the variety of them one after another [*Nisbet*].

Verse 8. This is the first thing which a covetous man desireth, to have nobody near him, nobody that may either borrow, or beg, or get anything from him. Wherefore, St. Chrysostom calleth a covetous man the common enemy of all men [*Jermin*].

The ties of kindred are forced upon us by nature, but those of friendship are within our own power. A loving and kindly disposition will gain friends. It is a man's own fault if he has no part in the kindred of souls.

The most selfish man has some connection with society, for he too is bound by the system of mutual dependence. Yet it is only a mechanical, and not a vital connection. Selfishness cuts the roots of social life.

Every virtue lies near some dangerous extreme. Activity in our worldly calling is commendable up to a certain point; but beyond this, wanting sufficient reason, it deserves the imputation of folly.

There is a diseased appetite for gain which only grows the more it is indulged.

The selfish soul can enjoy no true happiness, and is therefore driven to the unhealthy stimulus of one sordid thought.

The Mammon Man.—In his very nature he becomes as little human as that which he adores. Where his gold is buried, his affections too are buried. The figure which Salvian uses in speaking of him is scarcely too bold,—that his soul assimilates itself to his treasure, and is transmuted, as it were, into a mere earthly mass [*Dr. T. Brown*].

Even diligence must be restrained by rules. It should not degenerate into an unreasonable passion.

Verse 9. He who deprives himself of the advantages of society by a mistaken devotion, or his own selfishness, has but an impaired heritage of life.

Man has no such resources in himself so that he can find a sufficient defence in loneliness. He must lean upon another. The strength of a man's belief is more than doubled when he finds that his doctrine is received by another mind. Society is necessary for the very life of faith and action.

Society makes the Church possible. It is "where two or three are gathered together" that the Church is to be found.

Society lightens the tasks of labour, and exalts the enjoyment of its rewards.

God alone is self-sufficient—Man can only come to his true heritage of strength and enjoyment in society.

A single drop of water is insignificant, but united with the rest, in the ocean, it becomes an immense power. Society makes man sublime.

The improving of Christian Society for our furtherance in duty hath a special reward, not only after time, but even in this life. Hereby His people may expect to be sharpened, and have an edge put upon them in their duty—to have encouragements from others against difficulties—and fresh supplies of the Spirit drawn from heaven to each other by their mutual prayers; and so both their work is furthered, and their future reward ensured [*Nisbet*].

Verse 10. The fellowship of love will always render help in danger.

The true man never deserts his friend when he falls. The first impulse of love is to give succour. Love does not wait to investigate. Danger, sorrow, and necessity are sufficient arguments.

In the best state of society, there must of necessity be many falls into sin, danger, and sorrow.

That is the only religion for man which can show him a true helper.

The Christian, even though deserted by all, yet, like his Master, is never really alone.

A sense of loneliness and desertion plunges the soul into the most oppressive gloom of sorrow. Society, friendship, and love assuage our sharpest grief, and pierce the thickest gloom with a kindly ray.

To be a helper to the fallen is one of the noblest uses of society—it is the

joyful sound which fallen humanity hears in the Gospel.

In Christian society, mutual help has the highest motive, and the most splendid reward.

Verse 11. If two lie together in the cold night of sorrow and sadness, they have the heat of comfort, which mutually they yield one to the other, even by striking together the hard flints of their misery, by easing their hearts while their tongues talk of their distress, by supporting each other under their burdens who cannot bear his own, by doubling the light of counsel which may the better show them the way of getting out. If two lie together in the prison of affliction, society gives heat to their cold irons, softens the hardness of them, and though it cannot break them off, yet makes them to be borne with the more contentment [*Jermin*].

The fervent glow of zeal for the truth, the fire of devotion and love, can only be maintained by the close communion of mind with mind, and heart with heart.

True sympathy cannot be generated by proxy; the close contact of hearts is necessary to melt them into the tenderness of love.

The live coals of a furnace soon expire when isolated from the rest.

A heartless solitude chills the affections. Love delights in presence—seeks the companionship of one who is ever near.

The soul may sooner leave off to subsist, than to love; and like the vine, it withers and dies if it has nothing to embrace [*South*].

Verse 12. Love, by seeking companionship, provides a defence against the enemy.

It is the duty of the good to use their strength for the defence of one another.

As the union of the children of the Lord should be so strict, as their adversaries may lose hopes of breaking one of them, except they break all; so when the Lord doth unite them, it will be no easy matter for their most powerful enemies to prevail against them [*Nisbet*].

If we make friends by means of whatever wealth of mind, goodness, or estate we may have, we provide ourselves with a strong defence here, and with a welcome for us on the other shores of life.

The good man feels that though his native strength is small, yet, because he has communion with the Highest, and with all who are noble and true, his feeble power is multiplied by an infinite factor.

Mere doctrines, institutions, and laws can never give the Church power to vanquish her enemies. The Church can only be strong as a nation of brothers.

Unity in the Church gives strength to faith, increases charity, strikes awe into the enemy, and is the pledge of final victory.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—16.

The Instability of the Highest Dignities.

I. They are subject to the saddest reverses. The most favoured pets of fortune are not spared the common burden of human sorrow. Placed on a lofty eminence, there is below them a depth into which they might, at any time, fall. The pen of history has often described how the mighty have been pushed down from their seats. Here we have the picture of a dethroned king. (Verse 14.) We cannot expect otherwise than that such reverses will occur in the course of human affairs. 1. *Great principles must be vindicated against the mere assertion of rank and authority.* When the king is foolish, and will no more be admonished (Verse 13), he cannot wonder that his subjects will endure him no longer. The patience of nations is not infinite. Long oppression exhausts it. The time arrives when great principles must be upheld as of superior importance to rank and authority. 2. *It is often necessary to secure the public good even at any cost to individuals*

The great and the powerful have often been robbed of their dignity in order to save the state. The public good must be secured against the selfishness and tyranny of Kings. 3. *The season comes when it is expedient to render worth and wisdom a well-deserved honour.* (Verse 14.) There are men, now living in obscurity, who by their talents and wisdom are fitted to govern empires. The hour comes when these royal minds must have a true place and honour. Hence many born to the kingdom have been thrust down from their thrones to give place to those to whom nature has given greater fitness for empire and command. 4. *Kings may be the victims of popular fury.* They may come upon an evil time, and, through no fault of their own, be the victims of conspiracy and rebellion. II. The most fortunate have often but a brief triumph. The able and deserving man, when the world acknowledges his merit, and the time is ripe, sometimes rises from a humble sphere to sit upon a throne. Such extraordinary changes of condition are not unknown to history. He who attains to this splendid gift of fortune, awakens the enthusiasm of the multitude, who are ever prone to idolize success. Such a case is described. (Verse 16.) 1. *He has a crowd of adherents.* Such men are endowed with great power to influence and command others. Multitudes give a momentum to feeling — followers increase. Mankind are easily led in droves. *His dominion is very wide.* (Verse 15.) 2. *He is exposed to the most disastrous changes of popular feeling and opinion.* The time comes when the favourite is rejected. The people no longer rejoice in him. (Verse 16.) Popular feeling is not to be trusted. The hero of to-day may be the victim of to-morrow. He who has risen to the throne by real merit, may become corrupted by success, and give way to deeds of folly and misrule. The injured feeling of the nation at length recoils upon him with terrible retribution. III. Earthly Dignities, in their changes, furnish a picture of human life. Kings in their brief reign, and uncertain tenure of state and grandeur, are but a picture of the life of humanity through the ages. 1. *Each generation witnesses great changes.* The outward conditions of life are changed—new inventions multiply comforts, and give man a more complete dominion over nature. Nations frame new laws, and repeal old ones. The mechanism of Government is remodelled till the old order passes away. 2. *Each generation has a marked character.* Each is informed by the reigning spirit of society. The one idea which occupies the mind of the individual man, and fires his passion, is but a picture of the prevailing spirit of the age. Generations have a distinct character. In one the spirit of belief prevails; in another, doubt and scepticism. Now, there is almost an idolatrous reverence for authority; and, again, we fall upon an age of self-will and lawlessness. Every age has its own fashion of thought and feeling. 3. *Each generation appears upon the scene of life but for a short time.* Thrones have many succeeding occupants, and in "the hollow crown, that rounds the mortal temples of a King, death holds his court." So generations, who have wielded a power through their little day, are soon gone. Nothing continues at one stay—"there is no end of all the people."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 13. Neither length of days nor exalted station can, of necessity, confer wisdom. A man may continue a fool with all the appliances of knowledge about him, and all the lessons of time spread before him.

The occupants of thrones do not always possess regal minds. Illustrious station only serves to make great faults the more conspicuous.

The greatness of life depends upon what we put into it, and not upon age, or outward conditions. A poor youth with the spirit of wisdom may have more real nobility than an old king.

Wisdom can irradiate poverty, and

reveal the emptiness of mere earthly glory.

Rejecting admonition is often the forerunner to certain ruin.

To refuse admonition is in none a greater folly than in a king, because in none it is more pernicious, to none more dangerous; but to be grown old in wilful stubbornness, and self-conceited perverseness, as well as in years, and not only not to follow admonition, but not to hear it; as it is the extremity of folly, so it is the shame of honour, and maketh a poor wise child better worthy of it [*Jermin*].

Verse 14. Providence sometimes asserts the right of the wise alone to bear the rule.

We may well take Joseph to be this poor wise child; for that he was a wise child his father's love shewed, who therein may seem not so much as a father to have preferred his son before his other brethren, as a prophet rather to have preferred a mystery, in respect of that to which he foresaw the wisdom of his son would bring himself. But that he was also a poor child, the malice of his brethren who sold him for a captive made to be true. The rest God performed for him, and out of prison brought him to be the next in greatness in the kingdom. Yea, while he was in prison, what was he but even then a king? [*Jermin*].

There is no height of worldly grandeur so great but that Providence can fetch a man down from thence.

Through oppression, regal minds have sometimes languished in a prison. Some few have stepped from thence to a throne. Providence thus shows, that in the future kingdom, the wise shall bear the rule.

Even the glory of birth and station fails to lend a lustre to folly, or to save the foolish from a degrading fall.

Verse 15. While men in power and authority have the people flocking about them, honouring and acknowledging them, they should be taken up with the thought of a change, and consider the people as walking with the man that shall come up in their stead, courting him; and themselves as shortly to fall one way or other [*Nisbet*].

The power of the future overshadows the present.

As the powerful, the aged, and the wise pass away, Providence raises up others to take their place.

How soon the splendour of the mighty grows pale. New candidates for popular applause arise, and the once-renowned hero finds to his sorrow that he survives his fame.

The future has an element of oppression as well as the past. These two gulfs overwhelm the mind. We can only find peace by commending our soul to that Infinite love which reigns over all.

Verse 16. The most ardent worldly ambition must, sooner or later, receive a check from the hard facts of life.

The temper of future generations is but a reflection of that of the past. The facts of human nature remaining, the future can only repeat the old story of life, with all its changes, uncertainties, and reverses. Thus mankind is driven from age to age in the horse-mill round of vanity.

He who assumes the constancy of popular favour may have long leisure to repent his folly.

Every man advanced to eminency, power, or esteem among men, should look upon himself as standing upon a very slippery foundation, and particularly upon worldly applause, as a flower that will soon wither and become unsavoury. They should resolve to see their own applause die before themselves [*Nisbet*].

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Thy foot**] The outward movement, as showing the tendency of the heart. **The sacrifice of fools**] Some unworthy satisfaction of the religious idea—an offering whose purpose is merely to please God, and to serve as a salve for the conscience. **They consider not that they do evil**] Theirs is the error of simple ignorance rather than of any intention to deceive. **2. Rash with thy mouth**] Refers to the repetition of unmeaning words—mere babbling. **3. The multitude of business**] Lit. of annoyance—the worries of life disturbing the mind, and giving rise to restlessness and dreams. **6. Before the angel**] The representative of God in the Temple, *i.e.*, the priest. Or it may be taken literally, as expressing the early belief of mankind that angels are invisible witnesses to our conduct, especially in God's house. (1 Cor. xi. 10). **8. In a province**] Such being far distant from the seat of government, it was more likely that there oppression would be practised by subordinate rulers. *Higher than the highest, and there be higher than they.* The king is over the oppressive ruler, and over him there is the Supreme and Infinite Power, the King of Kings. *They.* Principalities and Powers all along the scale, at the summit of which is God. **13. To their hurt**] Inasmuch as they, at length, lose those possessions (verse 14). The owner is more unhappy than if he had never possessed at all. **17. Eateth in darkness**] A spirit of melancholy darkening the whole life. **20. He shall not much remember the days of his life**] An even joy is diffused through them—they pass smoothly and pleasantly along. *Answereth him in the joy of his heart.* Answers him by satisfying his desire, and thus prolonging his joy.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—8.

THE ETHICS OF DIVINE WORSHIP.

The Royal Preacher enters upon a new object of thought. Happiness is only to be found in religion, and the most exalted act of religion is worship. The solemn services of the house of God demand duty from the worshipper. I. We must avoid an unintelligent worship. God must be acknowledged in His relations to us as communities. Hence to attend His house for the purpose of worship is a solemn duty. Some cautions must be observed, if the service of the sanctuary is to be acceptable. The worship should be intelligent; marked by all the cautiousness, deliberation, and sobriety of thought. There are three principal classes of offenders against this requirement. 1. *Those who worship simply from custom.* They are not governed by the deep reasons of this sacred duty, but without due reflection follow what is considered to be a common obligation. Hence they go with careless feet, walking in the ruts of custom. They are imitators of others. Their devotion is *soulless—mechanical.* 2. *Those who worship with a pre-occupied mind.* The mind being filled with other objects, thought wanders, and the worship is but languidly performed. 3. *Those who in the act of worship are not completely possessed with a solemn purpose.* One great purpose must carry away the soul of the worshipper. The service of worship demands the concentration of thought and feeling. The soul, like the feet, must not wander in uncertainty, but go straight to her solemn purpose. II. We must avoid a Barren Worship. The worship is not to end in itself, as if external homage were all that was required of us. It must have issue in quickened spiritual power, and practical duty. No barren or unproductive worship is acceptable. 1. *The end of worship is to stimulate to obedience.* (Verse 1.) "To hear" in the language of the O. T. signifies to obey, *i.e.*, to hear with the inner ear. Thought is awakened that it might lead to action. The sense of the Divine presence summons to duty. Obedience is the proper vesture of the thoughts and feelings roused in the sanctuary. 2. *Worship without obedience has no rational ground.* The adoration

of the Divine Nature implies a respect for those laws of duty which are but an expression of that nature. A sacrifice, therefore, without obedience is but the sacrifice of a fool. It has no solid reason to go upon. Such worship is but a careless effort; without any wise design or sure aim. 3. *Worship without obedience is sometimes the result of ignorance.* It does not always arise from a pure and unmixed attempt to deceive, or to act the hypocrite. Some deceive *themselves.* They, being ignorant of the true way of religion, imagine that outward service will atone for many follies and sins—that the whole reckoning with heaven can thus be closed. This is the folly of many religions—they are but a salve for the conscience. III. We must avoid an Irreverent Worship. Reverence is essential to all true worship. It is the proper attitude of man before the Supreme. In order to secure the spirit of reverence, we must attend to certain rules of duty in worship. 1. *Be careful in the employment of words.* (Verse 2.) Rash and hasty words are here forbidden. This is not meant to check devotion, or to cool the ardour of the soul by some formal and severe requirement. It is opposed (1) *To empty words.* These are uttered without solemn reflection—empty phrases, possessing but little meaning for the worshipper. They are mere words, spoken without due consideration—"rash." It is opposed (2) *To superficial words.* They do not proceed from the inner depths of the soul. They are quickly uttered, and in any required number, as involving no expense of thought or feeling. Words that are not winged by the soul's desire cannot rise to heaven. It is opposed (3) *To all useless repetitions.* It is not a fatal defect in prayer that it is marked by some repetition, for the soul may love to linger upon a thought to make her desire more emphatic, or to express intense emotion. The habit censured is the [illegible]arding mere words as possessing merit—that their multitude can atone for sin, and make compromise for the high demands of duty. To avoid irreverence, we must 2. *Have a proper sense of the majesty of the object of worship.* We have to remember that God dwells in unapproachable glory, far beyond the reaches of our mind; and that we are upon the earth—the scene of ignorance, error, sin, and want. With such a conviction, the language we utter before high heaven will be marked by *brevity of expression.* A sense of reverence will impose on us a solemn reserve. The employment of few and careful words most befits the sacred act of worship. (1) *Because this is the method of true passion.* The most powerful feelings discharge themselves in few, simple, and direct expressions. True passion disdains the long array of words. (2) *Because it suits the nature of the duty.* The silent awe and admiration proper to worship must not lose their effect through the intrusion of the multitude of words. When in the presence of a Superior Being, reserve and caution are the most commendable qualities of speech. (3) *Because it is agreeable to the best examples.* The prayers recorded in the Bible are brief, and expressed in words of simple majesty. The Lord's Prayer is marked by fulness in little compass 3. *Have a proper sense of the evil of careless speech in devotion.* It has a bad effect upon the soul. The language degenerates into weakness and twaddle. Devotion becomes a mere babble of words involving no serious effort of intellect or heart. As dreams often arise from the perplexing cares and business of the day—these, in a confused manner, presenting themselves in sleep—so the multitude of words, though uttered not without some carefulness at first, at length degenerates into confusion and unreality. (Verse 3.)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. The feet translate the dispositions of the mind—they are the outward indicators of purpose.

There is a proper frame and disposition of the soul before engaging in worship. On the way to the house of God, the worshipper should be acquiring a readiness for its solemn services.

The royalty of the Supreme King demands a careful, reverent, and subdued manner in those who approach his Majesty.

Obedience is the most splendid issue of the adoration of the fount of law. Duty is our clearest revelation, and the path to our true honour.

The worship of God is a reasonable service, demanding the best fruit of the intellect and heart. He who does not make it a thoughtful and heartfelt exercise presents the sacrifice of a fool.

It is the simplicity of the heart, and not of the head, that is the best indictor of our petitions. That which proceeds from the latter is undoubtedly the sacrifice of fools; and God is never more weary of sacrifice than when a fool is the priest and folly the oblation [*South*].

The vanity, hollowness, and insincerity of the outward world intrudes even into the temples of religion.

In the spirit of that significant Oriental usage which drops its sandals at the palace door, the devout worshipper will put off his travel-tarnished shoes—will try to divest himself of secular anxieties and worldly projects—when the place where he stands is converted into holy ground by the words, "Let us worship God" [*Dr. J. Hamilton*.]

Verse 2. The tongue of the worshipper should not outstrip the fervours of his heart. Unless the words of devotion glow with the inner heat, they are but empty sounds.

It is an affront to the Majesty of Heaven to offer the unripe fruit of our mind and heart.

The multitude of words in prayer does not imply deep thought and fervour of devotion. They are but the tawdry garment that covers the poverty of the soul.

Before Job saw God with the inner eye, he was loquacious, but after sight of the Divine vision, his words "were ended," and afterwards he only opened his mouth to declare how he "abhorred himself."

He who regards the pure splendour in which God dwells, and the humble platform on which he himself stands, will render his devotion in few and careful words.

A heap of unmeaning words only smothers the fires of devotion.

Remember at whose throne you are kneeling; and be not verbose, but let your words be few and emphatic, as of one who is favoured with an audience from Heaven's King. . . . When the emergencies of life—some perplexity or sorrow, some deliverance or mercy,—at an unwonted season sends us to the Lord, without any lengthened preamble we should give to this originating occasion the fulness of our feelings and the foremost place in our petitions [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

The Lord's Prayer begins by reminding the petitioner of the lofty dwelling-place of that Being whom he addresses, yet this august Majesty of heavenly state is tempered by the endearing name of Father.

What a wide application may be made of these words both to teaching and preaching, to prayer and to our ordinary life! How many sermons, hours long, would be expunged by this censorship, though never so skilfully arranged and put together according to the preaching art. And if all sermons and other discourses concerning Divine things were purged from all useless, unedifying, fruitless, offensive, and wrong words, how few would the censorship leave standing! [*The Berleburger Bible*].

Verse 3. Tertullian, expressing the nature of dreams, saith, "Behold a fencer without weapons, a coach-driver without his running chariot, acting and practicing all the postures and feats of his skill. There is fighting, there is stirring, but it is an empty moving and gesturing. Those things are done in the acting of them, but not in the effecting anything by them. So it is in many words; there is often much fencing, but no weapons wherewith the enemy is wounded; there is much running, but no chariot winneth the race; much seemeth to be said, but it is to as much

purpose as if nothing were said; all is an empty moving of the tongue [*Jermin*].

All speech that does not commence upon the solidities of truth is unsubstantial as a dream, the multitude of words only making the disordered mixture more bewildering.

The fool's prayer is composed of —trifles—meaningless and unreal.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 4—7.

Religious Triflers.

There are some who do not distinctly oppose religion. They regard it, in some sense, necessary to them, and therefore observe its outward forms. But they are lacking in depth and serious purpose. They are but religious triflers. We have here the chief features of their character. I. They are Forward in Offers of Service. (Verse 4.) Reference is here made to vows, which easily enhance a man's reputation for piety; and which fools, without due consideration, are ever ready to make Want of seriousness leads to this irreverent trifling. Of these thoughtless religionists, we are taught, 1. *That they are ever ready to make promises of stricter and more enlarged service.* They would not lag behind the most ardent piety, and therefore declare their willingness to increase the bonds of obligation. In the time of peril, or when they desire some special good, they are ready to make the most solemn vows. But, 2. *They fail when the demand of duty is made.* In the powerful feelings of the time the largest promises are made, but they fail to fulfil their pious resolutions. They do not pay their vows. This arises (1) *From indolence and lack of spiritual vigour.* They have not sufficient moral strength to carry on their purpose to the right issue. They have no abiding principle—hence energy fails. It sometimes arises (2) *From avarice.* They soon discover that in an unguarded moment they promised too much, and imagine that God can be put off with less. The strong feeling has cooled, and the sober fact of duty affrights them. 3. *They are in a worse moral position than if the offer of service had never been made.* (Verse 5.) To have omitted to vow at all was no sin. God is satisfied with a steady service, an even, constant devotion. But to over-estimate our moral strength only lands us upon new difficulties. II. They are the Victims of Unreality. 1. *They are deceived by words.* (Verse 7.) They mistake words for things, the symbol of thought for the substance of it. Words are easily uttered, but when they are unreal, they lead the soul into a snare. How many are the victims of mere phrases! 2. *They are morally corrupted by words.* (Verse 6.) The mouth brings sin upon the flesh. The tongue has corrupted the whole man. Language reacts upon thought and feeling, and the habit of uttering hollow words only deepens the vain shadow in which such are walking. 3. *They are altogether the slaves of imagination.* (Verse 7.) Their words are but the flimsy and vanishing elements of a dream. Men of dreamy minds are unfit for the sober, and often prosaical, duties of life. III. They are Cunning to Invent Excuses. When the hour arrives for performing the vow, they are ready with plausible excuses. 1. *The plea of infirmity.* They urge that the vow was, after all, a mistake. It was simply "an error." (Verse 6.) The service was never really intended, but thoughtlessly promised in some sudden rush of feeling. Thus they excuse their forwardness and disown the obligation. 2. *They are bold enough to urge their plea before the representatives of God.* They say it before "the angel." (Verse 6.) They enter the place of the holy, and before God's appointed witnesses dare to present the plea of infirmity. They try to pass off a culpable rashness for a mere error. IV. They are Exposed to the Divine Judgment. 1 *They provoke the anger of God.* He is the God of truth, and can have no pleasure in those whose words are unreal, and whose whole life is a delusion. The religious trifler misuses the gift of speech, employing it in sophistry

and evasion. Hence he provokes eternal justice. God is angry at his voice. (Verse 6.) 2. *Their conduct brings its own punishment.* Such conduct must issue in the complete loss of their work. God will destroy it. (Verse 6.) Offended justice will reject their impertinent offers of service, and punishment fall upon those deceivers who profane holy things to serve the base uses of hypocrisy. 3. *Their punishment can only be averted by the fear of God.* (Verse 7.) This is the very soul of reverence. The fools—the solemn triflers in the sanctuary of God—must learn this fear, which is "the beginning of wisdom." They must return to *seriousness*, *truth*, and *reality*. They must learn *to respect the morality of words*—the sacred proprieties of speech. All falsehood and unreality must be destroyed before life can be placed upon a permanent and safe foundation.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 4. If Christians make voluntary vows at all, it should be with clear warrant from the Word, for purposes obviously attainable, and for limited periods of time. The man who vows to offer a certain prayer at a given hour for all his remaining life, may find it perfectly convenient for the next six months, but not for the next six years. The man who vows to pious uses half the income of the year may be safe, whereas the Jephthah who rashly devotes contingencies over which he has no control may pierce himself through with many sorrows. And whilst every believer feels it his reasonable service to present himself to God a living sacrifice, those who wish to walk in the liberty of sonship, will seek to make their dedication, as a child is devoted to his parents, not so much in the stringent precision of a legal document as in the daily forthgoings of a filial mind [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Promises to God should be prudently made, sincerely intended, and speedily fulfilled.

It is safest to allow the standing motives for duty their full operation. The seeking after a new stimulus may expose our piety to peril.

The contemplation of human folly, by the wise, raises the most loathsome images in the mind; how much more with him who is Infinite Wisdom!

Seek to maintain thy baptismal vows, wherein thou hast vows enough [*Lange*].

Frames of feeling and good words are but, at best, rudimentary virtue, until they are consummated in accomplished duty.

Verse 5. It is better to be slow in vowing than to be slow in paying. It is better to deliberate, and to hold long in suspense our doubtful resolution, than to be free and easy in our words, but hard and difficult in our works [*Jermin*].

By insincerity, or by some rash attempt to attain superior virtue, a man but injures his moral strength, and lowers himself to a position of less advantage.

Better to be satisfied with the ordinary lines of duty, than to run the risk of failure by attempting a more ambitious virtue.

The want of prudence is dangerous to every degree of goodness. Sobriety of mind and sincerity are the only solid foundations for a true life.

Some men cannot be restrained from placing themselves in positions where their folly is rendered conspicuous.

The Lord Jesus has often some severe tests for hasty disciples. How many does the profession of His religion place in a most serious spiritual position; showing them the rising path, yet exposing them to the risk of falling into the greatest depths! Better to remain in darkness, than to neglect to perform our day's-work while we have the light.

Verse 6. The mouth causeth the

flesh to sin when it promises what the flesh neither can nor will perform [*Hansen*].

A rash and ungovernable tongue can bring the whole body into bondage.

If we are not careful, our own words may become to us a delusion and a snare.

The tongue so far controls the whole man that, when it is tamed, he may be considered to have well nigh attained perfection.

Some are bold enough to utter the most hollow excuses before the messengers of God, as if they could thus compound for sin.

We must be careful what we reckon as sins of ignorance, lest our sin should remain and we be exposed to judgment.

Nothing in the religious character but what is based upon sincerity and truth can abide. All else shall be swept away by the Divine judgments, as the mountain torrent destroys the foundations of sand.

Verse 7. The fear of God is the best remedy against rashness. It instructs us in the lessons of prudence, and keeps alive in us a sense of the danger of insincerity.

The abuse of language has diversified sadly the vanities of life. "Dreams and many words" have led to serious evils. The interests of religious truth have suffered much from the vain imaginations of men—dreamy speculations, and from mere wordy disputes.

The fear of God imparts true sobriety to the religious life, delivering it from vain and fruitless distractions, and empty efforts. The Great Teacher was frequent in censuring those who took up religion too lightly, and who made promises which they were likely to break.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH—*Verses* 8, 9.

The Oppressors of Mankind Waiting for the Judgment.

If man would enjoy true happiness, he must study his duty to society; and abstain from deeds of violence and oppression. Though the dark pages of history, stained with tyranny and injustice, must fill him with sorrow, yet he may be comforted by the conviction that God will, in the end, interfere and redress all wrongs. I. The Existence of Human Wrongs calls for such an Interference. There have ever been, and still are, social wrongs in the world of appalling magnitude. There is, 1. *The tyranny of class over class.* The natural temptations of pomp and power are haughty indifference to the evils of those beneath them, and the spirit of cruelty and oppression. Men take advantage of the accidents of position to inflict misery upon others. The power of wealth has been often used to crush the poor. And not alone to the great in high places is this vice to be imputed. Smaller communities, and almost every parish, has its little tyrant. There is, 2. *The perversion of Justice.* (Verse 8.) Under the pretence of administering justice many wrongs have been inflicted. Even laws themselves have often been partial to the more favoured classes, but cruel in their general tendency and effect. The sacred name of justice has been prostituted to serve the basest ends. Tyrants have proceeded to their cruel work with the hypocrisy of loud professions of virtue. There is, 3. *The indulgence of the wild passions of human nature.* Extreme depravity may, for a time, be held in check by circumstances; but when the occasion arises, the envious flood bursts the bonds which held it, and spreads desolation far and wide. How many fair lands have been despoiled, and unutterable cruelties inflicted, when the loose rein has been given to the depraved passions of human nature! II. That these Sad Facts of Human History need not excite Surprise. "Marvel not at the matter." (Verse 8.) And why? 1. *Because the facts of human nature lead us to expect such a condition of things.* The evil taint clings to our nature still, however disguised by the outward proprieties of life, or held in check by righteous power. The violence

of temptation, conflicting interests—the impulse of ambition and of savage cruelty, still exist, in spite of civilization and the restraints of religion. The facts of human nature remaining, the wise man cannot expect otherwise than that *some* wrongs shall always exist: history having a tendency to repeat itself in the same sad and weary round. 2. *Because the best ordering of human society cannot put an end to every social wrong.* Laws may be improved, and the most laudable endeavours made to reduce, and even banish, all the evils that afflict society; still there will be room for much social injustice and oppression. Society can never be made good from the outside. While our natural corruption remains, and the prevalent evil of selfishness, there must be tyranny, oppression, and wrong. The most ardent dreamer of a social millennium must make up his mind to accept the facts of human nature; and the true prophet, gifted with sight into futurity, can, at best, have but a melancholy burden. III. That during the course of History, God uses Human Authority to mitigate this Condition. There are gradations in human authority—one rank above another. There are high, higher, and highest. (Verse 8.) The case is here supposed of an oppressor in a "province," remote from the central and chief authority. This subordinate governor takes advantage of his position to oppress his subjects. But above him there are superior authorities, and the "king" over all. (Verse 9.) Hence those who are wronged may obtain redress, and tardy justice at length come to their aid. 1. *Constituted authority stands in the place of God.* He reserves the complete and final adjustment of human affairs for Himself; but for the present He makes use of human authority in the government of mankind. Every representative of that authority is "the minister of God." (Rom. xiii. 4.) The special form of government is a human ordinance, but government itself is of divine appointment. 2. *The gradations of rank in human authority tend to secure the proper carriage of justice.* The lesser ruler is responsible to the greater, so that the dread of censure often serves to check those who are inclined to be tyrannical. Divine Providence thus uses the complications of human government to lessen the sum total of social wrongs. 3. *The protection of earthly kings is of immense benefit.* By the administration of wise laws, they protect the people and maintain peace; they secure for us the fruits of the earth by preserving our fields from invasion. The produce of the land is the source of the real wealth of the nation. It is for the advantage of the authorities themselves to promote the general wealth, for "the king himself is served by the field." (Verse 9.) Mankind are bound together by the ties of a common interest, and attain to the best social condition under the protection of wise laws. Hence though there is a heavenly King, the benefits derived from earthly governors are not to be despised. IV. That when Human History closes, God Himself will Interfere. There will be a personal manifestation of the King who is over all. If earthly authorities will not come to the aid of the oppressed and redress their wrongs, there is One above who will do it. 1. *There is a Supreme Authority.* Of the highest earthly rulers, it may be said that "there be higher than they." (Verse 8.) There is One who has absolute dominion and power, whose throne of justice is raised on eternal foundations, the highest resource of troubled souls, and the ultimate appeal of the oppressed. An earthly king, after all, is but a symbol. His power really resides with his subjects. He is merely clothed with power and authority. But the Heavenly King has power in Himself. Hence his dominion is the only reality of government—the only "everlasting kingdom." 2. *Though God promotes the welfare of society by means of earthly governors, yet He has reserved the final adjustment of human affairs for Himself.* The best human governments cannot prevent the essential evils of our present state. They can only reach the outward conduct as far as it affects the happiness of society. Human laws cannot touch the question of *sin*. They cannot enforce the kinder and milder graces of life—those which have the greatest potency to aid human necessity and assuage sorrow. Human justice,

in its best estate, is cold and severe; which, though it may command admiration, has no power to melt the heart, or touch the springs of human tenderness. This imperfection cannot go on for ever—the Divine governor must interfere to usher in His perfect kingdom. There are duties of piety and religion with which the Supreme Judge alone can deal. *There are moral discrepancies requiring such an adjustment.* Here, vice is often prosperous, enjoying the magnificence and splendour of life, while virtue is condemned to the grief of apparent failure. The happiness and misery of this world are not distributed according to the laws of eternal reason and high justice; the wise, the true, and the good, do not in the present state stand in their proper lot. There must be for these a better and a higher place, the lofty vindication of Eternal Justice, a perpetual reward. The oppressors of mankind will have to come to reckoning with the Righteous Judge, and for all the down-trodden and persecuted the Avenger will arise. Lessons,—1. *Be patient under the evils of the present.* 2. *Have confidence in the justice of the Eternal King.* 3. *Beware lest thou oppress any: if thou hast done so, seek reconciliation; lest they take their cause to the Supreme Court.* (Matt. v. 25.)

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 8. In this small province of God's dominions, the good have been persecuted, and justice, at best, but imperfectly rendered. The complaints of the oppressed have passed on from one human governor to another—many still standing to their account. But He who is "higher than they" will interfere, and redress the wrongs of His people, "redeeming their souls from deceit and violence."

Deep knowledge of human nature and history blunts the sense of wonder. He who has the widest experience of mankind comes at length to marvel at nothing.

The nature of evil men is to hate and to oppress. Their deeds need not excite astonishment. The righteous must not think it strange that they have to pass through fiery trials.

Why dost thou marvel that good men are shaken that they may be settled? A tree is not firm in the ground unless the wind do often beat upon it; the very shaking of it doth fasten the root more surely. They are weak that do grow in the warm valley [*Seneca*].

The righteous soul, who sees the oppression of the poor, and the perverting of justice, opens another eye, fixing it upon one bright spot in the future where the majesty of Eternal Justice will be asserted.

The Heavenly King waits long through the slow rolling of the ages: meantime the world's burden of oppression and wrong grows larger! But the avenger is afoot, and will at length overtake all tyrants.

The Highest is the strong refuge of the persecuted.

Let every man, according to his rank and God's command, do his work with the best industry; other things let him commend to God. Let him be patient and wait for Him who is able to find out and judge the ungodly and unjust. He who cannot lift a great stone, let him leave it lying and lift what he can. Wherefore, when thou seest that kings, princes, and lords misuse their power, that judges and advocates take bribes and allow causes to sink or swim as they can, being wise and sensible, thou wilt think within thyself, God will sometime bring about a better state [*Luther*].

Verse 9. In all grades of society, human subsistence is very much the same. "The profit of the earth is for all; the king himself is served by the field." "What hath the wise man more than the fool?" Even princes are not fed with ambrosia, nor do poets subsist on asphodel. Bread and water, the produce of the flocks and herds, and a few homely vegetables, form the staple of his food who can lay the globe under

tribute; and these essentials of healthful existence are within the attainment of ordinary industry [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

The great Roman poet has said that, "The Father of mankind Himself hath willed it that the way of cultivating the ground should not be easy." Hence the ingenuity of man has been stimulated to invent the means of subduing the soil. A wise king will, therefore, encourage agriculture and the arts and sciences.

The first of all human occupations is still the foundation of wealth, and the chief promoter of the industrial arts.

Mutual dependence is the law of society. The tiller of the soil spreads the benefits of his labour to all ranks, to the very highest. They, in turn, secure for him the protection of Government.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10—12.

The Impotence of Wealth.

Wealth, though it confers great social influence and power, has yet some elements of weakness, and fails when the severest tests are applied. I. Wealth cannot Satisfy the Desire it Raises. Wealth stimulates desire, and when attained feeds that desire; but not to satisfaction. (Verse 10.) The appetite only increases by what it feeds on. The fever of gain only rages the more with the increase of possessions. This insatiable desire of wealth is, 1. *Irrational.* Reason would teach us that as our wants are satisfied, desire ought to abate. When we have abundance, there should be the repose of contentment. Yet those who have gained great wealth desire more, not because it is wanted, but only to satisfy a restless craving. The undue pursuit of wealth is an infatuation—an untamed passion which has broken away from the control of reason. 2. *It shows that the soul is on some wrong track of happiness.* That which is a real good to man gives him a pure and a permanent joy. But when the pursuit of an object ends in an unsatisfying result and the rage of tortured desire, the soul has missed the path of true happiness. Riches do not satisfy, and cannot therefore be our chief good. 3. *It shows that man is greater than wealth.* He may yield himself to the absorbing passion, and worship the assumed majesty of wealth; yet in the lucid intervals of his better reason, he feels that the greatness of his nature refuses thus to be satisfied. And whether he understands the eternal truths of the soul or not, they have nevertheless their operation. He cannot go against the great facts of man's essential life. II. Wealth has Certain Evils Inseparable from it. (Verse 11.) 1. *As it increases, fresh channels are opened for its dispersion.* The rich man surrounds himself with a numerous train of attendants; who, though they minister to his comfort and ease, multiply his cares and eat up his stores. There are always plenty to spend the most carefully hoarded treasures. 2. *Increasing wealth creates artificial wants.* Luxury attaches new burdens to a man. He comes more and more under the tyranny of habit. The increased comforts and luxuries that riches procure become at last a necessity of nature. He who lords it over many thus becomes himself a slave. The artificial wants that are created have the force and impetuosity of nature. 3. *Wealth, however great, cannot be incorporated with the human soul.* A man cannot make his treasures the garniture of his soul. They are altogether outside of him. The owner of great riches, and of all that riches procure, can enjoy no superior advantage than the beholding of them with his eyes. (Verse 11.) A man really has only what is within him; all else is uncertain and transitory. III. Wealth is often gained at the Expense of Real Comfort. The rich man frequently but purchases his state and grandeur by the loss of solid comforts. The many cares of his great riches deprive him of the full benefit of some of nature's most important gifts. 1. *He is often deprived of the blessing of sound slumber.* (Verse 12.) The multitude of

cares, with which increased riches fill him, make his mind uneasy and banish sleep. All his riches cannot purchase this blessed gift. 2. *He has reason to envy his poorer neighbour.* Though he has power to multiply comforts, yet there are simple but important gifts of nature which are beyond his reach. These are often bestowed in abundance upon his humbler brethren. Relieved from complicated cares and anxieties, and prepared by the fatigue of labour, the poor man enjoys sweet sleep. His diet may be precarious; now a liberal, and again a scanty fare, yet his severe duty in the battle of life brings him repose. He may well be envied by pampered wealth seeking refreshing slumber in vain. The blest enjoyment of life is greater than any earthly treasure, and he who depends upon wealth for true happiness must miserably fail.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 10. When a man begins to amass money, he begins to feed an appetite which nothing can appease, and which his proper food will only render fiercer. To greed there may be "increase," but no increase can ever be "abundance." . . . . Could you transmute the solid earth into a single lump of gold, and drop it into the gaping mouth of Mammon, it would only be a crumb of transient comfort, a restorative enabling him to cry a little louder, Give, give [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

The love that burns in holy souls delights to rest in its object in calm and contented repose. But the base love of gain is a torturing passion, for ever uneasy and unsatisfied.

The feverish thirst for gain only rages the more its demand is answered; but all healthful desires are easily satisfied, and give repose and enjoyment to life.

The toils of covetousness know no Sabbath—no healthful relaxation of the strain of life. They hurry their victim onward to some illusive goal which recedes, as they approach it, into a land of vain shadows.

The soul has a capacity altogether infinite, and refuses to be satisfied with the vanishing good of this life.

What is a miser but a poor, tortured, uneasy soul and heart that is always looking after that which it does not possess; it is therefore vanity and wretchedness. If now God gives thee riches, use thy share as thou usest thy share of water, and let the rest flow by thee; if thou dost not do so, thy gathering will be all in vain [*Luther*].

Verse 11. The strongest chain, if it has sufficient length, will snap under the pressure of its own weight. Great riches may become so unwieldy as to ruin the happiness of their possessor.

The menial service and attendance which are at the command of wealth, introduce many complexities into life, and increase the burden of care and vexation.

It is wisely ordered that rank and wealth cannot be entirely selfish. They give employment and the means of subsistence to others.

The river that flows through the estate of the wealthy man cannot be pent up there, but must flow on to enrich other districts.

Great riches and multiplied sources of pleasure do not necessarily give increased capacity for enjoyment. If their owner lacks exquisite taste, and an answering mind, their effective power to raise his happiness is but small.

The spectator of the outward signs of grandeur often derives more real enjoyment than the possessor.

Let a man consider how little he is bettered by prosperity as to those perfections which are chiefly valuable. All the wealth of both the Indies cannot add one cubit to the stature, either of his body or his mind. It can neither better his health, advance his intellectuals, or refine his morals. We see those languish and die, who command

the physic and physicians of a whole kingdom. And some are dunces in the midst of libraries, dull and sottish in the very bosom of Athens; and far from wisdom, though they lord it over the wise [*South*].

A rich man buys a picture or a statue, and he is proud to think that his mansion is adorned with such a famous masterpiece. But a poor man comes and looks at it, and, because he has the æsthetic insight, in a few minutes he is conscious of more astonishment and pleasure than the dull proprietor has experienced in half a century. Or, a rich man lays out a park or a garden, and, except the diversion of planning and remodelling, he has derived from it little enjoyment, but some bright morning a holiday student or a town-pent tourist comes, and when he leaves, he carries with him a freight of life-long recollections . . . . . Such sight-seers, though they leave the canvas on the walls, and the marble in the gallery—though they leave the flowers in the vases, and the trees in the forest; they have carried off the glory and the gladness; their bibulous eyes have drunk a delectation, and all their senses have absorbed a joy for which the owner vainly pays his heavy annual ransom [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Verse 12. The refreshing repose which labour brings is often denied to the children of soft indulgence. Hence learn, 1. The limited power of wealth. It cannot purchase what is of the highest value. 2. The humbler conditions of life have some counterbalancing advantages. To the poor man is given that healthy refreshment and repose which his rich neighbour often seeks in vain. 3. How little does our true happiness depend upon the outward!

The walls of gold that keep out famine cannot bar the passage of the tormenting spirits of restlessness and anxious care.

The unequal distribution of human happiness is more apparent than real. The humblest plodder in the obscurest condition of life has his special advantages and consolations. Providence has wonderful compensations.

If the poor could get a taste of opulence, it would reveal to them strange luxuries in lowliness. Fevered with late hours and false excitement, or scared by visions, the righteous recompense of gluttonous excess, or with breath suppressed and palpitating heart listing the fancied footsteps of the robber, grandeur often pays a nightly penance for the triumph of the day [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

The most precious things of life are beyond the power of wealth to purchase. Like wisdom, sleep is the gift of God.

The worshippers of Mammon must submit to a most heartless tyranny—worn down by severe and restless service, and no solid reward to crown the end.

He who takes a thoughtful and sober view of human life will strengthen his sense of contentment, and abate the fires of envy.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—17.

THE MISERIES OF HIM WHO SURVIVES THE WRECK OF HIS FORTUNES.

"There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail, and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness."—*Ecclesiastes* v. 13—17.

In these reflections upon the vanity of riches, the Royal Preacher is supposing the case of one who has no internal consolations. When riches are flown, how is

it with such a man? I. He is placed in a Worse Position than if He had never been Prosperous. (Verses 13, 14.) 1. *There is the painful sense of failure.* He rejoiced in his treasures, made them his stronghold and boast; but now they have perished, and he is left without defence. The results of his labour and anxieties are lost. What he had lived for is now vanished from him. He is oppressed with the distress of failure. 2. *There are the sorrows of memory.* The remembrance of the past deepens the gloom of the present and turns it into pain. It is an unspeakable sorrow for a man to be forced to look at his greatness and prosperity only through the aid of memory and long reflections. Riches, when they have departed, are not absolutely hidden in the buried past. The memory of them arises to hurt and afflict the mind. How can a man in the land of poverty, where he is a stranger and an exile, sing the song of prosperity? He must hang his harp upon the willows, and weep the tears of memory. 3. *There is the oppressive feeling of impotency to satisfy his ambitious desires.* When he possessed wealth, he formed bright designs for the future which that wealth could accomplish. Reckoning upon the stability of his riches, he thought to build up his house; and, through the flourishing generations of his family, transmit his splendour and magnificence to posterity. But now the time has come when his favourite child is there, but no splendid mansion is for him. The heir is present, but the heritage has gone. (Verse 14.) There is a sense of departed power which is altogether overwhelming, and which is unknown to those who never possessed it. To be unable to perform what was once easily within our power is vexation and sorrow. II. He is brought Face to Face with the most Solemn Aspects of Life. If we direct our attention to the two extremes of human life, we are made to front facts of dread solemnity. Our utter nakedness, both upon our arrival here and our departure hence, is one of the saddest facts of existence. (Verse 15.) Death strips us of all our time-garments, and we go naked into eternity. Thus the grandeur of the world is but a vain show—the passing shadow of a cloud! This solemn truth is forgotten in the excitement of pleasure, quite inaudible amidst the tumult of the passions. But when a man is stripped of his fortune, the solemn facts of life assert themselves and he is forced to listen to their voice. 1. *How near are the fountains of sorrow!* In the midst of worldly enjoyments, if men only reflected deeply upon the solemn aspects of existence, how soon would the heart heave with emotion! The fairest pleasures of the world are but hastily snatched from the borders of misery and pain. 2. *What a teacher is adversity—imparting a due solemnity to the mind!* Affliction gains audience for truths which failed to secure a hearing in the time of prosperity. Death is indeed the great teacher, opening the eyes of man upon the higher mysteries; yet death is only the completion of that entire stripping of all earthly possessions which process adversity had begun. 3. *How great the folly of trusting in wealth!* It may depart long before us, thus afflicting us with the memory of joys now no longer ours. Or, if it stays, yet we must be rudely torn from it, and go into eternity with nothing in our hand (Verse 15.) It is unwise to put our entire trust in that which must fail us in the last necessity. III. He becomes a Prey to Melancholy. (Verse 17.) All what he trusted and delighted in is gone, and having no inward sources of comfort, a thick gloom settles upon his soul. It may be said of this inward condition, 1. *That it darkens for him the scenes of life.* There is light on every side, yet the darkness within him spreads itself over the whole scene of his life. The outward world takes the mood of our soul, be it merry or sad. In the gloomy seasons of our temper, it is in vain that nature strives to please. The darkness of the soul can overwhelm the light and glory of the world. 2. *That it is moral disease.* It is a sorrowful portion—the sickness of the soul. In health, all the bodily organs work together in harmony, and we are not directly conscious of the process. The man is said to be *whole.* But in disease, one or more organs, by becoming a seat of pain, assert their separate existence. Thus disease is disorder—a want of

wholeness. This fact holds strict analogy with moral unsoundness. When some painful truths are forced upon the soul without any countervailing good, it indicates moral disease. In this soul-sickness, there is "sorrow and wrath." There can be no health in the soul when there is no peace. 3. *It forebodes the last gloomy days of one who is entirely devoted to the present life.* For the soul without the comforts of religion, this darkness is but the shadow of death. Without God, there cannot be the light of joy, truth, and love.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 13. Wealth is often the ruin of its possessor. Like that king of Cyprus who made himself so rich that he became a tempting spoil, and who, rather than lose his treasures, embarked them in perforated ships; but, wanting courage to draw the plugs, ventured back to land and lost both his money and his life. So a fortune is a great perplexity to its owner, and is no defence in times of danger. And very often, by enabling him to procure all that heart can wish, it pierces him through with many sorrows [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

The base love of gain, when long indulged by success, multiplies the snares that will entrap and even fatally injure the soul.

The worshipper of Mammon will in the end be crushed beneath the fall of his idol.

Continued prosperity exposes a man to the vices of luxurious indulgence, neglect of religion, and a foolish confidence in his own greatness.

He whose heart has been bound up with his wealth can ill bear the loss of it. Having no inward resources, his condition is poor indeed. He is cast into the roaring tide of adversity; and he has no courage, strength, or skill, to stem the danger and gain a place of safety.

It is the highest wisdom to seek the true riches, which place a man above the accidents of life.

Verse 14. The Lord hath many ways to blast covetous men's idols. He can make use of the injustice and avarice of spoilers and oppressors, the deceitfulness of friends, and the prodigality of children to make their riches perish [*Nisbet*].

The memory of vanished joys is a bitter draught to those who have no spring of heavenly life and consolation within.

All earthly supports of the heart may soon fail us, and they must fail in the last extremity.

Virtue and knowledge are the best heritage we can leave to our children In all things else, they may be but the heirs of misery and disappointment.

Riches give a man power to command the service of many, and to summon the ministers of comfort. But how soon may the sceptre be snatched from his hand. His necessities and ambitious desires continue, but the power is gone.

Verse 15. At both ends of human life, all social distinctions are levelled.

The hand of death rends away our time-garments. We must leave here, on these shores of life, all the outward circumstances of wealth, and the soul be stripped for her last voyage.

He who by the stroke of adversity is denuded of his fortune, is hereby reminded of that utter desolation to which he shall be brought by the rifling hands of death.

Mental wealth, spiritual character—all that is truly within us, we can take away when we part for ever from the world. But our environment of wealth and grandeur must be left behind.

Alexander the Great is said to have ordered that, as he was carried forth to burial, his hands should "be exposed, that all mankind might see how empty they were."

Adversity clears a man's view of the most solemn and saddest facts of our nature. It is well if we lay them to heart, so that we may be rich in the wealth of immortality when death robs us of the passing treasures of this life.

Seeing that we go away naked, and can carry nothing hence with us, we should look upon nothing as our own; we should be careful to go away clothed with Christ's righteousness, and adorned with His grace, which is the durable riches, which whosoever hath shall not be found naked in death nor after it [*Nisbet*].

Here, we walk beneath appearances; but in eternity, we must stand forth in our true reality.

Verse 16. The thought of the preceding verse is here repeated, but with greater emphasis. The spiritual teachers of mankind find it necessary to repeat great truths.

The covetous man when life is ended is reduced to his first condition; he possesses absolutely nothing.

The riches of selfish and covetous men, 1. Give them anxiety and vexation in life; 2. Forsake them in death; 3. Accuse them before the bar of God.

The labours of man without God have no solid worth—no lasting profit. When at the close of life he looks upon them, he finds that they vanish into thin air. They were but appearances under the hollow image of a form.

If covetous worldlings would commune often with their own hearts, they could not but see their way to be no less unreasonable and unprofitable for attaining to happiness, than if a man would make it the business of his life to gather wind, which cannot be held though it be among his hands, nor can satisfy him though he could hold it [*Nisbet*].

Verse 17. When the power to enjoy is gone, and increasing infirmities produce fretfulness and inward misery, how vain are all the circumstances of wealth and grandeur!

Through the medium of our melancholy feelings, the fairest scenes of life appear to be overspread with gloom, True joy is within. The sun only shines for the happy.

As years roll on, the present world does not grow brighter and more joyous to him who lives entirely for it. Days of darkness await him.

You pass a staiely mansion, and as the powdered menials are closing the shutters of the brilliant room, and you see the sumptuous table spread and the fire-light flashing on vessels of gold and silver, perhaps no pang of envy pricks your bosom, but a glow of gratulation for a moment fills it. Happy people who tread carpets so soft, and who swim through halls so splendid! But, some future day, when the candles are lighted and the curtains drawn in that self-same apartment, it is your lot to be within; and as the invalid owner is wheeled to his place at the table, and as dainties are handed round of which he dares not taste, and as the guests interchange cold courtesy, and all is stiff magnificence and conventional inanity—your fancy cannot help flying off to some humbler spot with which you are more familiar, and "where quiet with contentment makes her home" [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Fretfulness and vexation wait on avarice.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18—20.

The Gifts of Providence—A Source of Spiritual Culture.

The plentiful gifts of Providence only serve to develop the depravity of some. They give loose reins to the passions, lead to forgetfulness of God, to fretfulness and despair. But, to the wise, they are a source of spiritual culture. They learn, I. To Use Them with Cheerfulness. (Verse 18.) They do not insult the

Creator and Preserver of men by spurning His gifts, or by the voluntary humility of self-inflicted austerities. Their cheerfulness is not the transient rapture of the children of worldly pleasure, but a habit of the soul. It is, 1. *The cheerfulness of pious gratitude.* The wise and good accept the bounties of this life as from the hands of God. Admiration for the source of all good awakens gratitude, and gratitude becomes a luxury. The joy of pious breasts is thankful, it is a deep and perpetual spring. It is, 2. *The cheerfulness of conscious integrity.* The wise and good follow the path of duty. They work diligently at the tasks of life, not turned from their calm and steady purpose by a restless ambition, or by grasping avarice. Their joy is not the intemperate sallies of worldly mirth; it is controlled by wisdom, it is generated by the consciousness of duty performed. Conscious rectitude alone gives true and abiding cheerfulness. The world's joy is a vanishing and unsubstantial thing. It is but gilding over a surface of misery which time will soon wear off. It is, 3. *The cheerfulness arising from the possession of a high purpose.* No man can have any deep and essential joy who is not conscious of possessing some high purpose in life. To him who can live above and beyond the world, who has higher aims than men around him, life becomes a sacred thing. The joy of his soul is invigorated by the imperial air of a better country. Feeling that his purpose is true and sublime, he has a sense of kinship with the most exalted ranks of God's servants. They learn, II. To Enjoy Them with Contentment. (Verse 19.) Whether their lot in life be poor and humble, or wealthy and distinguished, they take it as their portion, and rejoice in it as the gift of God. (Verse 19.) They are content with the appointments of Providence. 1. *Because they are marked by Supreme wisdom.* It is impotent and vain to rebel against our appointed portion in life, and to challenge the wisdom of Divine Providence. We are not proper judges of what is best for us, and our highest wisdom is to do our duty in that state to which we are called. The belief that the plan of our life is a Divine idea is the soul of contentment. 2. *Because there are evils attendant on every condition of life.* Both poverty and riches have their own peculiar evils and temptations. It is difficult to say what, on the balance, is the social condition most to be desired. Without Divine help, any condition of life must lead to fretfulness, vexation, and misery. But if God is acknowledged, and His gifts received with thankfulness, poverty is sweetened, and riches are enjoyed with moderation and prevented from becoming a vain confidence for the soul. When God is served with a willing mind, the evils of every condition are mitigated. 3. *Because the present arrangements of Providence are not final.* The outward conditions of men are not in accordance with their mental or spiritual characters. Great souls here are not always surrounded by the trappings of wealth, nor invested with the importance of station. But though the good man may feel that his present state is out of frame with Eternal Justice, he accepts the allotment of Providence with resignation, does his duty, and waits for the end. He who can look beyond the present life, and see the ultimate triumph of goodness and truth, easily learns the lesson of contentment with his portion in this world. The heir of immortality can wait in patience and hope for his full investiture and recognition. They learn, III. That Piety is the Secret of True Happiness. (Verse 20.) Human life has many miseries for the poor, the rich have many cares; all have to bear some portion of the load of trouble. But there are Divine consolations. There is a way of happiness whose secret must be caught from Heaven. 1. *Help granted in answer to prayer.* The godly man feels that he has no native ability to do the work of life well, to overcome its temptations, and to bear its trials. Weak and helpless, he goes to prayer, and rises strong and full of hope. He draws a joy from above which abides with him through all the changes of life. 2. *A life of inward peace is the gift of God to the good.* They only have peace who have righteousness. He who is con-

scious that he has well discharged his duty by Divine help, and with a sublime motive, inherits the blessing of a deep and settled peace. He does "not much remember the days of his life," it flows so smoothly on. A constant joy in the breast alleviates the sorrows of memory, and the impressions of the sharpest trials are worn down by a sense of the infinite goodness of God, and of the precious hopes inspired by religion. 3. *God alone can satisfy man's deepest want.* That deepest want is not happiness merely, but peace. We want a refuge from the upbraidings of the past, and the evil forebodings of the future. We want all thoughts and feelings resolved in one direction, and made to minister to one great aim and purpose of life. Then the soul rests truly in God. Peace gives the hand to true contentment, dwelling in the same breast. Then there is no discord between our desires and our outward lot; no discord between our affections and our mind; no painful doubts of the rectitude of God's dealings. The scenes of life, however diversified by joy or sorrow, are turned for the pious into the school of religion where the spirit of man is fitted to be advanced to immortality.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 18. The good things of this life should be the means of rational enjoyment, not the object of a grasping avarice.

There are some who rest in the present world, making it their chief end, and the highest object of the mind and heart. But the wise have made a better choice, passing through the world with higher aims and aspirations, yet tasting with gratitude the pleasures provided by the way.

The practical recognition of God imparts a beauty to the most common actions of human life.

The covetous man pursues wealth with such insane devotion that he shuts out all true happiness. It is folly to allow our labour to degenerate into a heartless slavery so as to leave no room for the wise enjoyment of the fruits of it.

Thankfully to use and enjoy the portion appointed by Providence is the easiest recompense we can render to heaven.

It was a sultry day, and an avaricious old man who had hoarded up a large amount, was toiling away and wasting his little remaining strength, when a heavenly apparition stood before him. "I am Solomon," it said, with a friendly voice; "what are you doing?" "If you are Solomon," answered the old man, "how can you ask? When I was young you sent me to the ant, and told me to consider her ways; and from her I learned to be industrious and gather stores." "You have only half learned your lesson," replied the spirit; "go once more to the ant, and learn to rest the winter of your years and enjoy your collected treasures" [*Lessing's Fables*].

Verse 19. Religion does not prohibit the acquirement of wealth, but teaches how it may best be enjoyed and bestowed.

He who has wisdom with his riches guides himself between the two extremes of avarice and prodigality.

The acknowledgment of God in the plentiful gifts of His Providence prevents them from becoming a snare.

The adoration of the Highest—the spiritual vision of the Supremely Good One, preserves the soul from all degrading worship. He who acknowledges the Giver will not make His gifts the occasion of idolatry.

As men's wealth and riches are God's gifts, so the power to use these for strengthening them in His service is a second gift; and wisdom to take their own due portion, neither depriving themselves of their own allowance, nor others to whom they are bound to give a part of theirs, is a third gift. And the grace to comfort themselves in so

doing is a fourth. And so the Lord should be acknowledged and depended upon for our daily bread, for our appetite after it, for the heart to take and use it, for wisdom and grace to take neither more nor less than our allowance of it, and to take that cheerfully [*Nisbet*].

A wise man enjoys wealth by a thankful use of it himself—by making it a channel of good to others—by turning it into a means of self culture and improvement. It is a great favour of Providence when God gives both wealth and large-heartedness.

Verse 20. The way to sweeten man's short and sorrowful life, to banish the sad thoughts of by-past crosses, and the fearful forecasting of future, is much correspondence with God, frequent prayer for refreshment from Heaven, and taking every comfortable passage of Scripture or Providence, which cheers the heart in God's service, for a joyful answer from God [*Nisbet*].

Prayer heals the sorrows of memory, lays the ruggedness of life even, and draws down from heaven a perpetual joy.

The attention of the wise man is not directed too much towards himself. He looks to God and to duty, not fretting nor worrying himself concerning the rest. No man can be healthy who is always thinking about his own health.

The sorrows of the past are perpetuated by handing them over to the care of memory. All our philosophy cannot banish them. But when a superior joy takes possession of our breast, they cease to torment. The old feeling is overwhelmed by the new.

The joy of God in the heart is a light which transfigures the whole scene of life, and makes it a more blessed and diviner thing.

CHAPTER VI.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Common among men**] In the strict meaning of the word, the reference is to the magnitude of the evil, and not to the frequency of it. That which appears to be good is discovered, after all, to be a great evil. **3. And also that he have no burial**] Through the lack of filial devotion on the part of his posterity, he is denied an honourable burial—one in accordance with his social position. **4. For he cometh in with vanity**] *Lit.*, Though it—*i.e.*, the abortion (ver. 3)—falls into nothingness, fails of reaching the dignity of recognised life. **And his name shall be covered with darkness**] Such receive no name; they are not reckoned with mankind, and sink into mere oblivion. **5. Not seen the sun**] The sun looks down upon so many scenes of vanity and misery that, in our melancholy mood, we consider that not to have seen it may be accounted a blessing. More rest than the other] Absolute rest from the sufferings and trials of life—they are better off. **6. Do not all go to one place?**] All go to School—"the house of assembly of all living" (Job. xxx. 23). There all arrive equally poor; nor is the chance afforded them to regain what they have failed to enjoy on earth. **7. The appetite is not filled**] The deep wants of the inner man are not satisfied, though the sensual part of him may lack nothing of indulgence. **8. Knoweth to walk before the living**] Knows how to walk accurately by the proper rule of life. Thus St. Paul—"See that ye walk circumspectly, *i.e.*, *accurately*, Eph. v. 15. **9. Better is the sight of the eyes**] The enjoyment of what is before us—our eyes resting contentedly on our lot. **10. That which hath been is named already**] Whatever happens has happened before, and long ago received its name; *i.e.*, the nature of it was accurately described and known in the plan of God. **And it is known that it is man**] *Lit.*, Adam. There is a play upon the name. Man is known to be what he really is, Adam, *i.e.*, man from earth. **Mightier than he**] He cannot contend with the All Powerful One. **11. Increase vanity**] All that tends to strengthen the impression of vanity. **12. What is good for man in this life**] What kind of lot is the best; seeing that all is uncertain, and the future is concealed. **After him**] The meaning is—not after his death, but after his present condition. The force of the question is—who can tell what is the next thing that will happen to him, or through what changes of fortune he may be called to pass?

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—6.

The Life of Life.

Man has two lives: the outward life which he lives, the manner and means of life—all his surroundings in the world. He has also that life *by* which he lives—the power to taste life—the strong feeling of a deathless existence. No outward conditions of life, however well-favoured, can of themselves secure the true happiness of existence, which is the very life of it. This is illustrated by supposing two cases in which men fail to attain the life of life. **I. They fail to attain it who have abundant sources of Comfort, but without Enjoyment.** (Verse 2.) We have here the case of a man endowed with wealth, and therefore possessing the means of satisfying every desire. He has also what all noble minds earnestly covet—the honour yielded to him by his fellow-men. Yet with these advantages, he fails of the true happiness of life. He lacks the power to enjoy. This may arise—1. *From physical causes.* An evil habit of body—some inveterate disease may make life for him a distressing burden, so that he has no power to taste with proper relish the comforts which his riches could provide. This may arise—2. *From mental causes.* He may have some unfortunate disposition of mind, a fierce and uncertain temper, or a spirit afflicted with perpetual gloom and melancholy. Thus some defect of mind or temper may mar the enjoyment of the most plentiful provisions. It may arise also—3. *From moral causes.* An uneasy conscience, the evil shadow of some great sin, or dark foreboding of the future, may rob the fairest earthly prospect of all its glory. It is not necessary to be pious in order to perceive the vanity of life, and to heave with emotion before the solemn facts of destiny. Of the life of life, we may also affirm—**II. They fail to attain it who have Age and Posterity, but without Respect.** (Verse 3.) The case is here supposed of a man who lives for many years, and has a numerous offspring, that much-desired blessing of the Old Covenant. Yet he has attained to an old age devoid of honour—his own posterity fail to do him reverence. He generated no kindly feelings in the breasts of others, he shed no light of love upon society, and now he feels the terrible retribution. He has the misfortune to live to be neglected and despised. He dies unregretted and unloved, the last offices performed for him scarcely deserving the name of burial—at best but a heartless service. His condition is sad in the extreme. This loss of the affection and good-will of others, giving birth to tender human tokens of reverence, is—1. *An evil which deprives life of some of its sweetest pleasures.* To live in the affections and grateful memory of others is pure delight; and a long life, gathering and strengthening human affections around it, has a special loveliness. But he who by his selfishness has deprived himself of friends, and forfeited his title to honour, should he arrive at old age, has but a prolonged misery. It is—2. *An evil indicating poverty of soul.* It argues a soul wanting in the higher attributes of moral and spiritual life—a soul not "filled with good." (Verse 3.) This destitution in man's inmost spirit is the saddest of human evils. It is a poverty which has no compensations. The selfish spirit of avarice is a non-conductor interrupting the flow of all kindly influences. It is—3. *An extreme and desperate evil.* That complete withering of the soul, that insulation from human love, which are the natural results of a life of selfishness, are evils of immense magnitude—of awful significance. To describe a man who has arrived at this miserable condition, language is used which appears to border upon extravagance. (1) *His condition is described as worse than that of one who has never seen the light.* "An untimely birth." (Verse 3.) Such have not attained to the distinction and dignity of a name—are not reckoned with the inhabitants of the world—quickly fall away again into the oblivion of darkness. (Verse 4.) Yet these have more

rest (Verse 5)—absolute freedom from toil and vexation—than the comfortless and unlovely miser whose whole life is a lamentation, whose closing days on earth are desolate, and who is denied honourable burial. 2. *His condition would not be improved on the supposition that he were granted more favourable circumstances.* (Verse 6.) Suppose him to live to the years of men before the Flood, yea, that he doubles in age those venerable sons of elder time, yet even then would his condition remain unimproved. His misery would only take a deeper tinge of darkness, if that were possible. A longer life!—this would only bring about the same evils in endless and weary succession. We do not find that men get less attached to the world and self as they grow older—that true wisdom is the necessary and inseparable companion of length of days. (Job. xxxii. 9.) "Even to the verge of the churchyard mould" they hug the idol of their heart, and turn away their faces from the charities of life and the consolations of immortal hope. 3. *What he has failed to attain in life cannot be recovered beyond the grave.* In the land of souls to which he is hastening, all arrive equally poor. No man can there recover his earthly losses. What he has done here is written on the iron page, and laid up for eternity. Acts of unkindness, cruelty, wrong, all the evil he had inflicted upon himself and others by his unloveliness—these remain. He cannot come back to the world again and re-cast the scene of his life anew. "I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world," is the solemn regret of the dying; and he who has failed to attain the life of life here must await beyond the grave, sad and unprofitable, the solemn judgments of God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. There is a sad lack of an essential and practical knowledge of some of the greatest and most widely-diffused evils which afflict humanity. It needs a sage to direct attention to them.

It is one end for which God hath filled man's life with evils, that we seeing them might not mistake our journey for our home. For travellers falling in their way upon some pleasant places, it is not seldom that the pleasure of their journey hindereth their going on, while that it doth delight them. And therefore while we are journeying to heaven, it is needful to see and observe the evils of earth [*Jermin*].

Verse 2. Riches, wealth, and honour—the Triad of sensual life.

How soon God may destroy the earthly happiness of the most prosperous man by taking away his power of enjoyment, though leaving his riches with him!

Providence teaches some men the truth, that the happiness of a man's life "consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

When the power of enjoyment is gone, the fairest prospects of life are darkened, and the glad profusion of riches becomes but the smile of scorn.

He who has devoted himself entirely to this world will, sooner or later, find life a weary portion, a tasteless thing.

He who ceased to enjoy his own riches may have the misery of seeing some reckless heir taste them with keen relish, thus giving prophetic significance of their rapid dissipation when he himself is parted from them.

The power to enjoy the world often passes away before the world itself. He who has no divine comforts will find that the path of life becomes more comfortless, and at length opens out into a dreary desert, where his fears increase, and sad forebodings.

Verse 3. A numerous offspring is often made the excuse of a grasping avarice.

A man may make himself so unlovely by his selfishness as to die in the affections of those who should love him most. This social death is the sad

penalty that covetousness pays to the offended laws of human nature.

Our value in the scale of true greatness does not depend upon the length of our life, but upon the good thoughts and deeds with which we fill our measure of life. If the soul is not filled with good, the longest life is vain.

He has no honourable burial who dies unregretted, and is followed to the grave only by the pomp of mercenary woe.

Better never to have opened the eyes upon the light of the world than to ruin a fair heritage of life by selfishness and sin.

A long life without rest and peace in God, is nothing but a long martyrdom [*Geier*].

What the untimely birth loses of natural life without any fault of its own, that the miser wantonly robs himself of in spiritual life. Because his soul has no firm foundation in communion with the good God, it goes to ruin [*Lange*].

Verse 4. Into this darkness therefore it is that the soul of a covetous wretch goeth, when the life into which he came is vanished away. And when his soul thus lieth in the darkness of horror, when his body lieth in the darkness of the grave, then is his name also covered, either with the darkness of silence, abhorring to mention it; or if it be mentioned, with the darkness of reproaches that are cast upon it [*Jermin*].

The natural vanity of life is most manifest in the sordid children of avarice. They have utterly failed to attain any true and noble life. The darkness which hides the glory of the world, and but reveals awful forms, at once describes their unlovely existence, and the rapid oblivion into which they fall.

When the soul is not filled with that good which God alone can bestow, a man's life is but a dark spot upon the map of time.

It is just with God to deprive men of a name after they are gone, who minded never the glory of His Name [*Nisbet*].

Unrighteousness is the death of the soul, and darkness is the shroud with which Divine Justice wraps it.

The light of God's favour alone can give to names an immortal fame. Where that light shines not, no earthly power, or care of human remembrance, can lift the gloom from the soul.

Verse 6. Human life, though short, is long enough for the purposes of probation. Those who have failed to learn the lessons of experience, and the knowledge of the holy, in the few years appointed to man, would remain in their sin and folly were life prolonged even to the years of men before the Flood, twice told.

In this present world, there is no substantial and abiding good which a man may hope at length to discover through the long years of time.

Length of days for the righteous affords time for ripening their graces, and fitting them for the vision of God; but for the sinner, they only serve to increase the sense of false security.

However long life may be, it leads to the dark house where man must await God.

Death will open the faithless eyes of men to look upon those awful realities which they failed to see here through their selfishness and sin.

Verse 5. They who have (as it were) thrust from them the gift of life, have indeed failed of the light and comfort it bestows, and remain but a dull negation. Yet these have more rest than those miserable men who would gladly invite the rush of darkness upon their souls, if haply they might find relief from the intolerable burden of themselves.

The soul that has no internal satisfaction must be ever restless and uneasy.

All the favours that wicked men enjoy are aggravations of their guilt, and so do increase their misery. Even this, that they have seen the sun, or have known anything at all, makes their case more sad than theirs who have not [*Nisbet*].

The consideration that in a short time

we shall all meet in one place, namely, the grave, or the state of the dead, should keep men from magnifying themselves for those temporary things wherein they excel others; and when men account others for the want of those things miserable in comparison of themselves, they forget the meeting place, death, which will equal all [*Nisbet*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. Verses 7—10.

True Satisfaction for the Soul.

Man strives to remove the vanity from life—to gain some solid satisfaction here, or what appears to him to be such. But there are false and true ways of seeking this desired good. I. It cannot be gained by the Indulgence of the Senses. Human life is full of care and trouble. Some try to escape the burden of it by indulging the sensual appetites, or by a merry behaviour seek to hide the thought of it in forgetfulness. Yet the deep and essential appetites of the soul cannot hereby be satisfied. (Verse 7.) 1. *Because the appetites become blunted by indulgence.* As the several appetites are fed by their natural objects, they become less discriminating, and their power to taste grows less exquisite. Custom steals away the charms of novelty, and the more the sensual appetites are indulged, the earlier does the season of weariness and disgust of life set in. 2. *Because man has wants which the indulgence of the senses cannot satisfy.* Wants of the *intellect—conscience—affections.*—These will make their voices heard amidst the most exciting pleasures of the senses. Strange pangs of hunger can afflict the soul when the body is ministered unto by all that profusion of pleasures which riches can secure. 3. *Because the saddest truths of life will, at some time, force themselves upon the attention.* The most devoted children of pleasure, by the changes of human things, are brought face to face with the tremendous realities of existence. By their own afflictions and those of others; by the tortures of pain, and the anxieties of the last sickness, they are made to face the dread solemnities. There are great truths that command silence, and enforce a hearing from the most thoughtless. A man feels that he requires a higher good than this world can afford, and a more imperishable defence than wealth and pleasure. II. It cannot be gained by Ordinary Thoughtfulness and Prudence in Behaviour. There are those who are not spiritual men, and yet they are convinced that a life devoted to sensual indulgence is folly—that there are nobler aims and satisfactions for man. They have enough light and moral strength to discard the common forms of human folly, and to guide their conduct in life by moderation and prudence. These go very far towards true wisdom, and even closely imitate the graces of religion. There is a wisdom and prudence of great use in guiding a man's way through life, yet divorced from piety in the strict sense. Of such a character, we may affirm: 1. *He has modest views of himself.* He has no high notions of himself, but is content to be poor and lowly in his own eyes. (Verse 8.) He has too much wisdom—sees too far and clearly around and above him to indulge in the swellings of pride. 2. *His outward life is upright in the sight of men.* He knows "how to walk before the living." He observes his duty to others, is correct in his behaviour, and does not waste himself in the ways of vice and folly. 3. *He makes the best maxims of prudence the rule of his life.* He sees the folly of avarice, and is content to enjoy the present with moderation. He prefers indulging in what is before him to the passionate, uncertain, and unhealthy pursuits of ambition. (Verse 9.) Yet all this does not remove vanity from life. The prudence of the children of this world may go very far towards beautifying and adorning human life, yet it does not bring a man solid satisfaction. Without some higher principle of life, and a larger view than the present affords, we may ask, what advantage has the wise man after all? (Verse 8.) III. It can only be gained by a Pious Submission

to the Supreme. He who is truly wise knows that God is great, that he himself is weak and helpless, and that to submit to the guidance of the Infinite One is the highest prudence for man. (Verse 10.) This includes: 1. *A practical recognition of the Divine Plan.* Whatever has been, and is, was named and appointed long ago. In the ways of Providence there is no rude chance, nothing irregular, nothing uncertain, on God's side of it: with Him, all is fixed and determined. The future is already known and named. Submission to the plan of God is true wisdom, because for the truly wise and good He will mark out a safe and prosperous way through all the apparent confusion and disorder—yea, even through the rigidity of destiny itself. It must be well, in the end, with all those who are "partakers of the Divine Nature." 2. *A sense of the frailty of our nature, and the need for Divine help.* "It is known that it is man." (Verse 10.) His very name, Adam, expresses the idea of frailty. Hence his absolute dependence upon Divine help. It is only when we are conscious of the aid of the Supreme and Infinite Power that we can have solid satisfaction. He who has the strength of God on his side is secured against all defeat, fears no foe, and has within him a perpetual joy. 3. *A sense of the folly of persistent opposition to God.* (Verse 10.) It is in vain for a man to contend with his Maker—a madness to imagine that he can bend Omnipotence to *his* purpose. Our wisdom is to submit to the will of the Highest. In doing and suffering the Divine will, we have the charter of our freedom, the true conditions of our peace, and the best education for the land of the happy where that will is perfectly obeyed.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 7. The necessity for food is the spur of all human industry. Hunger is the taskmaster of humanity.

By his powers of sensation, man stands connected with the present toiling, suffering world; but by his spiritual nature, he forms part of a larger fellowship, and claims a loftier home.

However plentiful the satisfaction of the fleshly appetites, and the desire for grandeur and display, there is a longing for something which is not here. Men seek it vaguely and blindly, or with clear vision and hope. There is a hunger of the soul which allows no man to rest till it be satisfied.

Some souls are conscious of a deep spiritual want, as an infant is conscious of the pain of hunger. It feels, but knows not how the sensation may be satisfied. In other souls, where reason and conscience are active, there is at the same time with the perception of the distress, the apprehension of the remedy and the purpose of attaining it.

They are strangely deluded who think that if they had more of things worldly their desires would then be satisfied. Till the soul of man close with, and rest upon, that infinite soul-satisfying good, God reconciled to them in Christ, give it never so much of other things, the appetite will still cry, give, give; the consideration whereof should convince men that they are miserable who seek satisfaction in those things wherein it is impossible to find it [*Nisbet*].

Verse 8. The highest human prudence, when divorced from deep religion, is only for this life. The difference between it and folly is indeed great when seen from the stand-point of time; but when looked upon from the heights of immortality, the difference vanishes.

Of what avail is that wisdom which does not make the immortal nature supremely happy!

He who has climbed to the top of the mountain has reached a higher elevation than the man who remains at its base. But for the purpose of reaching the stars, both situations are equally ineffectual. Human prudence and folly are alike impotent to secure that supreme

good which can only be attained through our spiritual nature illumined by the distant light of eternity.

Man stands in certain relations to God, as well as to society; therefore, to honesty and integrity towards men, there must be added piety towards God. The Gospel religion includes morality, but also much more. It raises a man to a nobler citizenship than any earthly nationality can bestow, and therefore imposes a superior code of duty, and requires a corresponding elevation and nobility of character.

The Christian religion furnishes the *best* forms of what is *good* in this world. It refines upon the best ideas of the unaided mind of man—giving us graces for virtues. By the culture afforded by wisdom and prudence, a man may go very far towards attaining the beauty of the Christian character.

What doth it profit to go after Christ unless we come unto Him? Do thou, O Christian, there set down an end to thy course, where Christ did set down an end to His [*St. Bernard*].

Verse 9. To cool the fever of our desires, and remain contented with our lot, is better than restless ambition—the unhealthy stimulus of wild adventure, seeking to explore some unknown fancied happiness. Yet if there be for man no higher destiny than this life, we mournfully ask, for what end is all this wisdom?

The wisdom and prudence of the children of this world cannot abide the fiercest storms. There they are shattered, and nothing is left but the poor remains—"vanity and vexation of spirit."

Solomon means that we make use of the present, thank God for it, and not think of anything else—like the dog in Æsop, which snapped at the shadow and let the flesh fall. . . He forbids the soul running to and fro, as it is said in the Hebrew, that is, we are not to be always weaving our thoughts together into plans [*Luther*].

Verse 10. In the roll of ages, no new element in the problem of human destiny arises. The old questions and difficulties return. All was named and determined long ago.

In the confessed impotence of successive philosophies, the awful lessons of history, and the vanity of all human effort, the helplessness of man is revealed.

By the name of the first man we are reminded of our earthliness, dependance upon our Maker, and our frailty.

As God's cause is always just, it is vain to contend with Him; seeing that He has power to maintain His honour, and vanquish His foes.

1. Fate is fixed. All the past was the result of a previous destiny, and so shall be all the future. . . It depends upon our point of view whether the fixed succession of events shall appear as a sublime arrangement or a dire necessity. It depends on whether we recognise ourselves as foundlings in the universe, or the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ—it depends on this, whether in the mighty maze we discern the decrees of fate, or the presiding wisdom of our Heavenly Father. It depends on whether we are still skulking in the obscure corner, aliens, intruders, outlaws; or walking in liberty, with filial spirit and filial security—whether our emotion towards the Divine foreknowledge and sovereignty be, "O fate, I fear thee," or "O Father, I thank thee." 2. Man is feeble. And Christless humanity is a very feeble thing. His bodily frame is feeble. A punctured nerve or a particle of sand will sometimes occasion it exquisite anguish; a grape seed or an insects' sting has been known to consign it to dissolution. And man's intellect is feeble, or rather it is a strange mixture of strength and weakness. . . Insane when contending with one that is mightier, man is irresistible when in faith and coincidence of holy affection he fights the battles of the Most High, and when by prayer and uplooking affiance, he imports into his own imbecility the might of Jehovah [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 11—12.

THREE OPPRESSIONS OF HUMANITY.

I. The Oppression of fruitless Toil after Happiness. (Verse 11.) Some fancied good ever lies before us, but we are doomed—if we have no resource but earthly wisdom or contrivance—to toil after it in vain. 1. *Every advance we make only increases the sources of annoyance.* As we pass from the possession of one seeming good to another, in this life, our brief happiness receives successive impulses; and we indulge the hope of enjoying in peace the rewards of endurance and conflict. But when we have gained what we sought after, and the gifts of life are multiplied, and the objects of our ambition secured, we find that at the same time there is generated for us an increase of vanity and vexation—a more complicated misery. Riches bring cares; honour and fame set a man up as a mark for envy, and make him feel more keenly the pain of wounded pride. 2. *In the best conditions of earthly happiness, there is a craving for some unpossessed good.* Men never attain to the end of their desires—never reach a state of satisfaction and repose—the goal ever lies beyond them. There is no anchor to stay the soul on the troubled sea of life but immortal hope, and those who have it not drift in danger and in fear. They have no safe harbour where they can be sheltered till the indignation be overpast. This fruitless toil after happiness is one of the oppressions of man. It is that burden of vanity under which the creation groans, and which only God himself can lift from the soul. **II. The Oppression of Ignorance.** (Verse 12.) The empire of human knowledge expands from age to age, but the great problems of existence still remain unsolved. All our investigation, all our labour of speculative thought only pushes the mystery further back into the darkness. The unknown is ever the terrible; and darkness is not only the deprivation of light, but also the region of fear and terror. The imagination paints horrid forms where the eye can no longer see. This ignorance is considered here under two forms. 1. *Ignorance of the best conditions of happiness.* If we have only the wisdom of this world to direct us, it is hard to tell what state of life, on the whole, is the best. Every condition has some disadvantage, and it is difficult to strike the balance. Humanity without the light and comfort of religion must remain in ignorance of that most concerning question, how can the soul be happy in all the scenes and changes through which it is called to pass? Even spiritual men must feel that there are aspects of human life, the contemplation of which, for the present, is not without pain. They also must wait for the clearing up of mystery. This burden of ignorance presses upon all; some are sustained under it by faith and hope, to the rest it is an intolerable load—a weariness and vexation. 2. *Ignorance of the future.* A man "cannot tell what shall be after him." He knows not what shall occur in his own immediate circle, or in the broader field of history. The intellect is equal to the task of framing principles which future history will be certain to illustrate. The spiritual man knows that certain great moral truths will be vindicated through all the events of the future. But what those events shall be in their number, variety, and special issues, no human sagacity can foresee. That part of the roll of history which is still to be unfolded by time, is hidden from us, and our keenest vision cannot read the writing there. In front of the darkness and uncertainty lying before us, we can only utter the cry, "Who can tell?" **III. The Oppression of Weakness.** Man's life is "vain," and he spends it "as a shadow." There is no enduring substance in it—no power of defence against the terrible forces which threaten, and will in the end overwhelm it. 1. *This weakness is felt in our utter helplessness before the great troubles and disasters of life.* In the time of prosperity, when the love of life is strong, and the enjoyment of it keen,

we may glory in the conscious possession of power. But our triumph is short; and when a great trouble arises, we feel how weak we are. All our science and skill can raise no permanent defence against disease, nor hold us back from going down one of the many paths to death. Wealth and grandeur are no defence in the day of trouble. The grim realities of existence mock at our poor refuges, and sweep them ruthlessly away. 2. *This weakness is a cause of sadness and misery to humanity.* To feel ourselves strong is a happiness—a grateful assurance for the mind. While we have plentiful reserves of strength, there is a consciousness of security which is pure enjoyment. But to be weak is to be miserable—to feel ourselves the sport of every unfriendly power. The weakness of man revealed to him by *misfortune, suffering, and death* is one of the saddest burdens of the race. The Gospel makes a gracious provision for humanity oppressed by these three burdens. 1. *Christ offers rest to those who weary themselves for very vanity.* 2. *Christ promises to dispel the darkness of this present state.* He makes duty the condition of the higher revelation; through goodness, man reaches that splendour where all is clear. 3. *Christ arms the soul with His own strength.* That soul whom He strengthens can fear no foe. He who is joined to the highest is as secure as the throne of God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 11. What the better is man of that reputation which only makes him more envied? What the better is he of that wealth which only makes him obnoxious to plots and dangers? What the better of that philosophy which, like a taper on the face of a midnight cliff, only shows how beetling is the brow above him, and how profound the gulf below, whilst he himself is crawling a wingless reptile on the ever-narrowing ledge? What the better is acquirement, when, after all, man's intellect, man's conscience, man's affections, must remain a vast and unappeasable vacuity? [*Dr. J. Hamilton.*]

In our anxiety to get rid of the burden of vanity by new diversions, pursuits, and acquirements, we only make that burden the heavier, and condemn ourselves to the grief of failure.

The boasted improvements of reason, while they enlarge our view and refine our taste, at the same time serve to render the sense of misery more acute.

No imagined change in the external conditions of a man's life can make any radical improvement of his real self.

The diseases of the human spirit are inveterate. Not only are we not healed by the physicians who undertake our case, but we grow worse under their hands. We can only be healed by a miracle of grace.

Verse 12. What we often looked forward to as a source of great good has turned out to be a great evil. The sages have failed so often in the experiment of determining the best conditions of happiness, that there can be no certain knowledge except by Revelation. Faith alone can heal the sorrows of the mind.

The voice of complaint and distress is heard from every position in the social scale. In the face of this fact, who can tell, on merely human principles, what is best for man?

It is a "vain life," and all its days a "shadow." A shadow is the nearest thing to a nullity. It is seldom noticed. Even a "vapour" in the firmament—a cloud, may catch the eye, and in watching its changing hues or figure, you may find the amusement of a moment; and if that cloud condense into a shower, a few fields may thank it for its timely refreshment. But a shadow—the shadow of a vapour! who notes it? Who records it? . . . . But Jesus Christ hath brought immortality to light. This fleeting life He has rendered important as "a shadow from the rock eternity." In His own teach-

ing, and in the teaching of His Apostles, the present existence acquires a fearful consequence as the germ, or rather as the outset of one which is never ending. To their view, this existence is both everything and nothing. As the commencement of eternity, and as giving complexion to all the changeless future, it is everything; as the competitor of that eternity, or the counterpoise to its joys and sorrows, it is nothing [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

The mysterious depths of the future are hidden from human eye, but nothing shall be found there which can hurt or alarm the righteous. In the upshot of things, there will be seen the triumph of great moral principles, and the vindication of goodness wherever it is found.

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**2.** For that is the end of all men] Not the house of mourning itself, but the fact that every house must, in turn, become such. **3.** Sorrow] Not that passionate and unavailing sorrow of the children of this world, but that salutary grief for our own sinfulness—the godly sorrow of 2 Cor. vii. 10. Laughter] The boisterous merriment of the children of light enjoyment, as distinguished from that recreation of reason—that spiritual joy in which it is proper for the righteous to indulge. **7.** Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad] The meaning is, not that the wise man by oppression is driven to the verge of madness, but that the oppressor himself (who but for his own fault might have been a wise man) suffers intellectual and moral injury by repeated acts of unkindness and wrong. His higher intelligence becomes deadened, and he falls into the wretched condition of those in whom the lamp of reason is extinguished. A gift destroyeth the heart] A bribe accepted by men in power corrupts the moral nature. This kind of corruption was common amongst Oriental nations. All could be procured for presents. **11.** Wisdom is good with an inheritance] Wisdom, though good in itself, yet when joined with ample means imparts a power of doing good to others. **12.** Wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence] *Lit.*, in the shadow of wisdom, etc. In countries where the heat was oppressive, a shadow would be the natural symbol of protection. The excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it] Both wisdom and money give a man superior advantage in the battle of life. But wisdom is life itself—the principle of the soul's animation and vigour. **14.** In the day of adversity consider] The last word belongs to the next statement, as if the Preacher said—Consider the adaptation of one part to another in the system of Divine Providence. God also hath set the one over against the other] Even things evil in themselves are employed to bring about the purposes of God. The consideration of this is a source of comfort in adversity. To the end that a man should find nothing after him] God so acts in His government of the world that man cannot fathom the future. **16.** Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself overwise] This is not intended to inculcate carelessness in moral conduct, nor as a beatitude upon ignorance. The meaning is, that we are not to scrutinise too narrowly the ways of God. We are to avoid that boldness which dares to say what would be just or unjust for Him to do, as though we could manage the world better. We are also to avoid rash speculation, full as it is of danger, tending to the destruction of true spiritual life. **17.** Be not over much wicked] Though all men are sinful by nature, yet some sin maliciously, and of set purpose. Even the righteous sin through weakness, but they set a watch over the ways of moral conduct. Therefore, beware of crossing the border-line, lest you sin with consciousness of evil. **18.** That thou shouldest take hold of this; yea also from this withdraw not thine hand] Avoid the two extremes, of a false righteousness on the one hand, and a life of carelessness and sin on the other. **19.** Ten mighty men which are in the city] Ten heroes, or commanders, at the head of their forces, to whom the defence of the city is entrusted. **27.** Counting one by one, to find out the account] Collecting the results of many observations—thus forming an opinion carefully and slowly. **29.** Many inventions] Refers not so much to the devices of wickedness, but rather to evil arts, perverse thinkings, foolish and adventurous speculations.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—7.

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF GOODNESS.

I. It makes Life Real and Earnest. Goodness in the soul expresses itself outwardly in actions of moral beauty—deeds of kindness and love. These win the admiration of society. Hence arises a good reputation. Goodness in character possesses an immense power, transforming human life into a solemn reality, and filling it with earnest endeavour. It does this, 1. *By supplying the noblest impulse of life.* (Verse 1.) A man of high spiritual character cherishes an increasing passion for goodness. He desires one excellence above all others—that he may be right and true himself, and secure a good reputation amongst men. This is the noble ambition of the pure and holy. They aim to be good—to be like God; and so have a definite and lofty purpose in life. With such, life is an earnest and real thing. The constant striving after goodness imparts increased faculty to the powers of the soul. 2. *By redeeming life from all that is frivolous and vain.* Goodness in man must have in it an element of admiration for a goodness higher than his own. When the soul is enamoured of God's holiness, life becomes a serious thing. It is seen with sober eyes, and felt to be the place for the discharge of loving duty, not for vain, trifling, and thoughtless frivolity. Good men have the aspirations, feelings, and refinements of true greatness, representing amongst their fellows the style and circumstances of a nobler citizenship. They have higher pleasures than feasting, a more exquisite joy than the thoughtless mirth of the children of this world, and more solid entertainment than the songs of fools. (Verses 3, 4, 5.) **II. It Preserves the Soul from Great Dangers.** There are forms of sin which have the most disastrous consequences, even in this life. They deprave every faculty of the soul. Two of these forms are introduced here as having elements of special danger—acts of tyranny and oppression, and corruption of the heart by receiving bribes. (Verse 7.) Here we have two great dangers, from which the love of goodness and the desire of a fair reputation save us. 1. *The injury of the rational faculty.* He who indulges in repeated acts of tyranny and oppression becomes at length a monster, and hateful in the eyes of men. All his higher powers suffer injury. He loses his rational understanding; and when this is gone, destruction is near at hand. Sinners of this class madly pull down ruin upon themselves. 2. *The injury of the moral faculty.* When those in power and station take bribes, their moral faculties become weakened. They lose the sense of fine and delicate perception in things relating to conduct. In the strong language of Scripture, their whole moral nature becomes "corrupt," *i.e.*, broken together—unfitted for performing its proper functions. It is only by obedience and love that the delicacy of the moral sense can be preserved. **III. It Changes the Complexion of Earthly Sorrows.** The sorrows of human life wear a forbidding aspect. The children of this world strive to forget them in the dissipation of pleasure, or they are driven by them into sullen despair. But goodness in the soul, appearing in the moral beauties of character, transforms sorrow—yea, transfigures it into the bright and heavenly. Sorrow, instead of being an unmixed evil, consuming and fretting the spirit of man, becomes the channel of precious benefits. 1. *Death becomes a great teacher.* (Verse 2.) When men die, their houses are filled with friends who mourn their loss. It is but nature to weep then, in the presence of the greatest sorrow that can fall upon any home. But good men though they feel the common distresses of humanity, and shrink instinctively from the terrors of death, yet learn to make them the occasion of spiritual benefit.

Death becomes a great teacher, giving them solemn lessons which they lay to heart. From what appears to be the terminus of life's journey, good men can discern the lights of another and better country. Death himself holds the torch which shows them the path of life. 2. *Human sorrow becomes a moral renovator.* (Verse 3.) The same afflictions which sink some men into despair, or drive them into the mazes of unreal and unwholesome pleasures, only refine the nature of the good man. They purify his affections from every mean and base element. "The heart is made better" by the pure and heavenly objects which it loves—by the increased fervour of its devotion. It is often in the seclusion of sorrow that the noblest purposes are framed, and strength is gathered for the greatest moral victories. 3. *The pain of righteous reproof becomes more grateful than the loudest joys of the world.* (Verse 5.) "The rebuke of the wise" may be painful to a good man who has committed a fault, or has been betrayed into folly; but he accepts it with thankfulness, and learns the lessons it imparts. If the righteous thus smite him, he shall deem it a kindness; for they but imitate the action of the Merciful God who wounds only to heal. When the smart of reproof is over, they feel a greater joy than in listening to the thoughtless and empty merriment of fools. IV. It makes Death itself to be Gain. (Verse 1.) To our merely human apprehension, all the circumstances of death are clothed with terror. Levity turns pale at the contemplation of the last enemy, and the hardiest frame shudders as with a mortal chill. But the death of a good man is for him but a step in the path of progress; and for others a precious example, and a support of faith and hope. Let us consider the death of the good (1) *As a gain to society.* There are certain elements of loss to society when the good pass away for ever. Yet death serves to set the virtues and graces of their character in a fairer and more enduring light. Whilst in this work-day world, they are not fully known; but death sets them on high, where they "shine as the stars for ever and ever." Death opens the way to fame, and when their presence is no longer with us, they bless us with the scented fragrance of their ended life. How have the Apostles of our Lord gained by death, in the estimation of mankind, and in an ever-expanding influence! St. Paul and St. John are more fully known and revered at this day than they were in their own times. 2. *As a gain to the individual.* The day of a good man's death is better to him than the day of his birth. It is an introduction to a sublimer state of existence—the day of his better nativity. It is in death that his soul seizes the infinite, and enters upon the wealth of all her mysterious nature. Death loosens the righteous from care, temptation, and sorrow. It is to him the greatest of liberties.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. At this point, the Royal Preacher enters upon a new stage of enquiry. He had laid open the sins, sorrows, and perplexities of humanity; now he seeks a remedy. If men would be happy and secure amidst all the storms of evil fortune, they must be good. They must learn to interpret the lessons of affliction, to control passion, to exercise wisdom and knowledge in conduct, and must seek to regain that uprightness which was the property of human nature as it came fresh from the hands of its Creator.

Whatever perplexities may arise in the contemplation of our existence and condition here, there are certain things that must be right. It must be right to cultivate goodness, to have confidence (notwithstanding appearances) in the rectitude of God, and to put ourselves in harmony with those Divine laws which are the charter and the pledge of liberty.

A good reputation springs from inherent goodness in the soul. The spiritual life within must work itself outwards. The savour of our good

name cannot be confined; but like a precious ointment, it fills the whole sphere of our influence.

The richest perfumes, like every luxury of sensation, exhaust themselves, but the aroma of a good name is for ever fresh, and unhurt by the wrongs of time.

The awe and veneration which a good name inspires is the homage which society pays to virtue.

Just as a box of spikenard is not only valuable to its possessor, but pre-eminently precious in its diffusion; so, when a name is really good, it is of unspeakable service to all who are capable of feeling its exquisite inspiration; and should the Spirit of God so replenish with His gifts and graces, so as to render his name thus wholesome, better than the day of his birth will be the day of his death; for at death the box is broken, and the sweet savour spreads abroad. There is an end of the envy, and sectarianism, and jealousy, the detraction and the calumny, which often environ goodness when living; and now that the stopper of prejudice is removed, the world fills with the odour of the ointment, and thousands grow stronger and more lifesome for the good name of one [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Birth introduces the good upon the stage of a severe probation, full of risk and danger; but death fixes their goodness, placing it beyond the reach of injury. The monster, created by natural fears, is for the righteous but a friend who removes the load of earthly endurance, thus giving liberty to the soul to recover her strength, and to try her unencumbered powers.

In life, the righteous are but outdoor servants of the King of kings. In death, they are admitted to His palace, where they serve with increased dignity and comfort.

Verse 2. A good man possesses the heavenly secret of distilling sweetness from sorrow.

The contemplation of suffering and death, with the practical recognition of the teaching they impart, best prepare us for that land where sorrow is unknown, and where life endures to immortality.

He who is spiritually wise discovers that the afflictions of our mortal state have their bitter root in sin. He penetrates beneath the surface, and contemplates that moral evil from which all natural evil grows. He therefore boldly faces the solemn fact which will restore for him the lost harmonies of creation, for it makes a "new earth" as well as "new heavens."

The coarse mirth of the world ends in disgust and weariness, having no element of permanent consolation and hope. But the discipline of sorrow refines the character, imparts a serious and thoughtful attitude to the soul, and gladdens it by a hope beyond the grave.

In the place where they mourn for the dead, a man is reminded that to this also *he* must come. When a few years, at most, are gone, his own house will be turned into a house of mourning.

It is better to lay to heart the most painful facts of life, and to learn their solemn lessons, than to indulge in the forced merriment of foolish men.

The winds and the waves are terrible powers, but man, by the exercise of his reason and invention, forces them to render him obedient service, and to carry him whither he would be. So heavenly wisdom and goodness in the soul turn the sorrows of life into the means of spiritual improvement. The forces that destroy the foolish are elements in the triumph of the wise.

God saith unto the Prophet Jeremiah, "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear My words" (Jer. xviii. 2). The "potter's house" is the house of mourning wherein is the earthen vessel broken, the earthen vessel of man's body, broken by death. And if we shall go down thither, that will make us willing to hear the words of God, whereby to keep our souls from the infection of sin. The very temper of sadness is a friend to virtue [*Jermin*].

Verse 3. Godly sorrow, leading on, as it does, to endurance and experience, thus becomes one of the ancestry of hope. The laughter of the world is changed to sorrow which at length degenerates into remorse.

Worldly joy gleams on the surface, but leaves the heart within unchanged, still evil and unprofitable. The sorrows of the righteous may leave a sadness on the countenance, but peace and joy reign within.

The design of Providence, by the discipline of sorrow, is improvement.

By affliction the heart is made tender, and thus prepared for the impressions which the love of God can make upon it.

The affections of the soul are often trained in the school of adversity. The first lessons may be a wearisome bitterness and pain; but they impart superior moral culture, lead to the sweets of victory, and to bliss without alloy.

Strangers to godly sorrow must needs be strangers to their own blessedness [*Nisbet*].

Verse 4. A wise man will choose to go where he can learn most of the nature of those great realities with which he is concerned. In the house of mourning, he learns to see—1. The rebuke of pride and vanity. 2. The evil of sin. It surrounds our removal to another state with such awful circumstances. 3. The importance of goodness as a defence against the unknown and untried. Whatever the great future may reveal, if we have attained to the Divine image, we cannot fail.

It is with no sorrowful acceptance, but with glad heart that the righteous take up the cross. They follow that Divine Leader, who, though He may conduct them through barren and unpromising regions, will at length bring them to the heights of immortality.

The fool has no far-reaching sight, no power of penetration into the dread realities around him. Hence he is pleased with what glitters before his eyes, and only seeks the satisfaction of the present.

Let the heart of the wise go to the house of such an one as may reprove him when he offends, that he may bring him to tears, and make him to lament his own sins; and let him not go to the house of mirth where the teacher flatters and deceives; where he seeks, not the conversion of his hearers, but his own applause and praise [*St. Jerome*].

The moral nature of the inner man is determined by the objects of the heart's satisfaction.

Verse 5. The rebuke of the wise is but the sharp incision of a cunning hand that wounds only to heal. It is the rod of gentle and loving reproof, not the fist of wickedness.

The rebuke of the wise, though it may occasion a smart, leads to moral improvement; but the songs of fools, though they may afford some passing entertainment, are without any worthy aim.

There is in rebuke a jarring and harsh music, because it opposeth the fault that is committed, it disagreeth with the mind of him that hath committed it: but yet it is better music than the melodious songs of flattering parasites, who, leading on in wickedness, do bring on to destruction [*Jermin*].

The rough-hewn marble gives but the promise of a statue. Many a stroke and finishing touch must be given before it attains perfection. So the spiritual character requires those frequent touches of wise reproof which gradually shape it into symmetry and beauty.

It is better to follow the course of duty, though it may seem commonplace and the conditions of it severe, than to be lured to destruction by the siren songs of sinful pleasure.

Verse 6. The joy of fools seems as if it would last for ever, and does indeed blaze up, but it is nothing. They have their consolation for a moment, then comes misfortune, that casts them down; then all their joy lies in the ashes. . . . . Pleasure,

and vain consolation of the flesh, do not last long, and all such pleasures turn into sorrow, and have an evil end [*Luther*].

In the mirth of the children of this world there lies no deep moral worth. It is but a sudden blaze of the fancy, or the passing joy of a tickled appetite.

This world's mirth may be loud and imposing, but the sound of it quickly dies away, and the heated passion which inspired it subsides into melancholy and regret. Nothing remains but the ashes of disappointment.

The mouth of the righteous shall then be filled with laughter, when, the tears of their pilgrimage being dried up, their hearts shall be satisfied with exultation of joy. When the servants of God, being filled with joy of a manifest beholding of Him, shall, as it were, break forth into a cheerfulness of laughing, in the mouth of their understanding. Then their laughter shall not be as the crackling of thorns under a pot, but as the singing together of the morning stars, and as the shouting for joy of all the sons of God [*Jerman*].

The mirth of sinners is noisy and short-lived, but the joy of the righteous is like the everlasting lights that shine in the calm depths of heaven.

Verse 7. The health of the mind, which is wisdom, can no more be trifled with than the health of the body. Acts of cruelty and oppression harden the heart, dull the moral sensibilities, and gradually steal away every attainment of virtue. When the sound mind is lost, a man becomes a prey to every delusion and foolish temptation.

That a wise man may be changed into a monster of cruelty is an illustration of the terrible power of sin. It can destroy the tender charities of nature, and impart to the conduct that wild recklessness which amounts to fury, and which calls for the restraints of Divine judgment.

Acts of cruelty and oppression tend, more than any other forms of human sin, to efface the image of God in the soul. They cause a man to approach to the likeness of the Evil One, who is both the Destroyer and the Adversary.

To ruin the promise of wisdom by entering upon the most dangerous courses of folly, is moral madness. Covetousness destroys the heart of them that are under the power of it; blinds their understanding that they cannot see the evil of anything that makes for their gain; sways their heart to receive bribes, which being received, they think themselves obliged to gratify the giver by perverting justice in his favour [*Nisbet*].

It is dangerous to weaken our moral sensibility by yielding to the lust of gain. When the heart is destroyed, there is taken away from a man the very capacity for religion.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8—14.

The Counsels of a Religious Philosopher.

Human life, duty, and destiny are here contemplated from their philosophic side. We have moral and prudential maxims from one whose philosophy does not lose itself in vain speculations, but mixes with men, and exerts itself in the humbler but more useful task of contributing towards right practice. Counsels such as these tend to mitigate the evils of our condition, and to inspire us with a better hope. I. Be Patient under Trial. (Verse 8.) The patient man is he who meekly endures, who bears present evils and troubles with resignation, and who is free from that unreasoning and passionate haste which is the bane of impetuous natures. He is here contrasted with the "proud in spirit," because that blindness to reality, that wilfulness, that fierce vindication of self-love, all of which are pressed into the service of pride, are alien to that patience which sees clearly our true position, accepts the will of the Highest, and refuses the aid of

passion to support a fictitious glory. Pride and patience are mutually exclusive. The patient man is superior to the proud, because, 1. *He recognises the uses of discipline, and a purpose wider than himself.* However dark and perplexing his present trial, he knows that God has some worthy end in view, that His will is being accomplished in the improvement and perfection of all who piously and meekly endure. He is satisfied that the righteous are safe, though they pass through much tribulation into the kingdom of God. He whose character is stamped with such convictions, bears the imprint of such lofty thoughts and purposes, has a wider horizon and a sublimer idea of life than the wretch who is concentred all in self. Breadth of view, that nobility of mind which despises the mean, and small, and selfish, is the mark and quality of true greatness. 2. *He is more easily moulded for goodness.* Wilfulness lies at the root of pride. He whose aim is to glorify himself scorns the yoke of obedience. There is a kind of rigidity in such which refuses to be shaped into the form and excellence of goodness. They refuse the dictation and control of the will of the Highest, setting themselves against it in stubbornness and rebellion. But the will of the patient man is tamed and subdued; he learns easily the lessons of duty—of faith and hope. He resigns himself into the hands of that Divine Artificer who can mould him into His own image. Our steps cannot be directed in the paths of peace and goodness unless we "acknowledge Him in all our ways." But this involves the forsaking of our own will, and of that pride which refuses to submit. 3. *He is content to wait for the end.* Patience signifies something more than meek endurance. It is often opposed to that disposition which cannot wait. The proud man is in haste to secure the short-lived triumphs of the hour. He rushes on to his purpose, not heeding, not caring, what human and Divine rights he may trample upon. He is completely under the tyranny of the present. This contracts his view, and seals up his affections within himself, so that he wildly reaches out to the glittering things that lie near, unmindful of the holy and the high. But the patient man feels that, though the present trial may be grievous and the way dark, the "end" will be "better than the beginning," and so he waits in hope. To be able thus to take in a large view imparts nobility to the character. II. Subdue the Violence of Passion. (Verse 9.) A wise man learns to control passion, to keep it from bursting out into the intemperate heats of anger. It is the triumph of religion thus to subdue the wildness of nature, and so to tame the passions that they easily submit to the yoke, and thus become the servants of virtue. Anger rests only "in the bosom of fools," *i.e.*, with the irreligious. Of such passions it may be affirmed—1. *That they indicate a nature uninfluenced by great moral convictions.* The practice of goodness in the quiet paths of duty, and constant meditation on those great truths which concern our relations to God and eternity, tend to keep down the violence and fury of the passions. Righteousness (which is the result of great moral convictions) brings peace, and peace finds a congenial home with contemplative souls. Anger is the vice of the thoughtless, but it is far from minds accustomed to regard the solemn aspects of life, duty, and destiny. 2. *They indicate a mischievous employment of useful powers.* It is not the purpose of religion to destroy the passions of human nature, but rather to give them a right direction. No original endowment of our nature is either mischievous or useless. Nothing is made in vain, either in the material or moral world. The organs of the body, though they may become the seat of disease, yet in their healthy state serve beneficial ends. There is a pious use of anger. When it is directed against sin, oppression, and wrong, it strengthens the just in their righteous cause. Those noble champions who have sought to redeem their fellow-men from the tyranny of ages, have found their weakness turned into strength and impenetrable defence by the stimulus of a holy indignation. When anger is kindled upon the altar of God, it is just and good; but as an unreasoning passion, raised suddenly upon

the slightest provocation, in our daily intercourse with men, it is but the offering of a "strange fire." That anger which is quite disproportioned to the offence, and fails to weigh the circumstances of it with accuracy, is a weakness and baseness of nature—an abuse of powers capable of nobler employment. 3. *They are hurtful to others.* Anger has been a fruitful source of oppression and wrong. The history of religious persecution bears ample testimony to the sad fact that the innocent and the meek have suffered from the fury and rage of this base passion. Even in the narrower circle of domestic life, how much evil arises from hence—what deep and lasting wounds! Anger may proceed no further than words; yet even these become sharp instruments of torture, and memory renews the pain. When passion slips from the control of reason and righteousness, it can only spread disaster and misery. Anger is native to the bosom of fools, who are naturally careless, and serve their own selfish ends at any cost to the feelings and rights of others. III. Do not Magnify the Past at the Expense of the Present. (Verse 10.) It is a common fault with men of peevish and fretful dispositions to praise past ages, and to mourn over the degeneracy of the times in which they have the misfortune to live. This is often the vice of age; for the old man is proverbially a praiser of the times when he was a boy, and a severe censor of youth—of all that is new and fresh. This disposition to magnify the past can also be observed in some of those arguments brought from antiquity, wherein the authority that is hoary with time is made to overrule the most convincing evidence. In the history of human thought, there have been times of intellectual tyranny when it was treason to teach contrary to the doctrines of Aristotle. This tendency to the undue glorification of past times can only be corrected by study and reflection, by the cultivation of a contented mind, and by that sobriety of judgment which frees a man from the slavery of the unreal. This disposition arises—1. *From dissatisfaction with the present.* Men despise all what is near and about them as things common and familiar. That which is hidden from their observation is invested with peculiar sanctity. The past possesses a vague sublimity which often serves to charm away the fancied evils of the hour. 2. *From the illusion of distance.* As distance in space tempts the imagination to indulge in gay fancies which lend enchantment to the view, so distance in time entertains the mind with a pleasing illusion. Antiquity, instead of being rated by the sober judgment of historical facts, becomes a mere sentiment. Poetry is made to take the place of logic. To act thus is not to "enquire wisely" concerning these things. It is not the part of the religious philosopher to forsake the sure ground of facts in order to follow fancies. There must be something faulty in our *moral nature* as well, when we fail gratefully to acknowledge the good that marks our own times, and seek an ineffectual relief in the fictitious glory of the past. This fault is the indication of a nature dissatisfied with itself, and spreading the gloom of its own discontent upon all around. It is a revelation of moral character. IV. Consider wherein Man's Real Strength lies. (Verse 12.) Wisdom—that intellectual and moral sagacity which imparts sobriety to the judgment, and steadiness to the walk in the paths of duty, has also this excellence, that it is the defence—yea, the highest defence of man. A feeble image of its power to protect, and to give assurance, may be seen in the social estimate of the potency of riches. They, too, in their way, are a defence; they give a sense of security, ward off many evils, and endow men with power and influence. These properties raise the consciousness of strength. They are regarded as a material defence against calamity, and in unspiritual minds the protection they afford is sufficiently magnified. So far, the analogy between wisdom and money, as a source of defence, holds good. But beyond this point they part company, diverging into widely different issues. Wisdom has this superiority, that it "giveth *life* to them that have it." Consider how wisdom contributes to this result, and affords the only reliable protection against

real evils. 1. *There are some evils from which neither wisdom nor money can save us.* Our sagacity and prudence sometimes fail to ensure what is called success in life. The highest qualities of goodness do not suffice to ward off disaster. They grant no title of exemption from taking our sorrowful portion in the community of suffering and woe. In this regard, wisdom stands on a level with riches, as a defence. Riches cannot prevent the invasion of sickness, calamity, and death. And wisdom is equally powerless to deliver us from these evils. 2. *Wisdom has superior consolations.* In the great troubles of life, the comfort gained by wealth is but limited and insufficient. When man is fairly within the grasp of the last enemy, his wealth can give him no assurance or joy. But to the good man, journeying through the dreariest desert of life, wisdom is a spring to refresh him, a tree to give him shade. And when time is setting with him, and the last struggle approaches, conscience gives him strength and assurance. In the kindly light of faith and hope, he humbly awaits what God has laid up for him. 3. *Wisdom is the only essential and permanent defence.* All other defences are temporary, quite unavailing in the severest trials, and the greatness of man can afford to dispense with them. Wisdom gives life, and from hence springs the consciousness of strength, that robust courage, which is confident of victory. Life is the sphere wherein man's highest hope rests and expatiates. To him who is assured of life, what is death itself but the dark and painful struggle into his second birth? Life, in its deep spiritual significance, is perpetual existence under the smile of God. This is the greatest power—the strongest defence of man. All else are shadows; this the only enduring substance. V. Be Resigned to the Established Order of Providence. (Verse 13.) Resignation—that habit of humble submission to the Divine will—is man's true wisdom, the garment and proper adornments of piety. Hereby is patience kept alive, and grows strong for her perfect work. There are two considerations which should prevent men from murmuring at the established order of Providence. 1. *Such conduct is useless in itself.* We cannot withstand God, or alter His determination. We are able to collect the facts and discern the laws of Providence, as we do those of the solar system, but we are powerless to effect any change in either of these spheres of the Divine operation. God has not taken us into His counsel. His wisdom is not so weak and fallible that it should call to us for aid. In the laws of Nature and Providence, there is no help nor happiness for us but by submission. It is vain to contend with infinite wisdom and power. For man, in his ignorance and bold defiance, to lay his puny hand upon the revolving wheel of nature is destruction. 2. *Such conduct is impious towards God.* Most men in the time of adversity fail rightly to "consider the work of God." If we see no presiding will behind the present system of things, we become fretful, disobedient, full of despair; and in the vain attempt to help ourselves, find only bitter disappointment. But if we see God in all these things, we learn self-control, and submit with pious resignation. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it," says the Psalmist (Psa. xxxix. 9). Ours should not be the submission of despair, or of sad reconcilement to the inevitable, but rather that joyful submission which has all to hope for from a Father's hand. As God is wise, and good, and loving, He can do nothing arbitrary. If we are good and true, we can afford to wait, even through present obscurity and discomfort, till God shall manifest Himself, and bring with Him full reward and consolation. VI. Do not Force the Spirit into Unnatural Moods. (Verse 14.) A wise man is marked by that simplicity of character which avoids all affectation and insincerity. In the various moods of feeling through which he is called to pass, he is (in the best sense of the word) natural. We should use no devices to disguise or falsify our feelings, but let them have full expression and fitting exercise, according to their nature. 1. *Give proper expression to joyful feelings.* Prosperity comes from God, and should be a cause

for devout thankfulness and joy. Love to Him who sends the blessing should dispose us to this; for what is joy, but the recreation of love? It is love taking exercise, casting off for a while the weight of care and sorrow, and sporting itself in the sunshine of prosperity. "Is any merry? let him sing psalms," (James v. 13). We should allow our feelings to flow in their proper channels and not repress them by an unnatural asceticism. We have this element in the Book of Psalms, wherein the most lofty expressions of joy are used, and nature herself is made responsive to the gladness of the soul. 1. *Give proper expression to the feelings of sadness and gloom.* While adversity should not drive us to despair, to doubt the goodness of God, or to insane endeavours to extricate ourselves; yet, at the same time, it should not tempt us to assume a stoical indifference. Not to feel the rod of the cross, the chastisement of God, is a great evil. The Prophet complains, "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved." (Jer. v. 3.) Job refused this wretched consolation of hardness of feeling, and scorn of affliction's rod. "Is my strength the strength of stones? or is my flesh of brass?" (Job vi. 12.) 3. *Learn the lessons both of prosperity and adversity.* In prosperity we should learn gratitude, a sense of our unworthiness, and discern herein a prophecy of a better and more enduring world. In adversity, we are told to "consider" the moral aspects of the affliction. These duties are not rigidly exclusive. We are not taught that prosperity should be thoughtless, and adversity joyless. But the consideration of the solemn facts of our moral probation is specially appropriate to the season of adversity. (1) *Consider that the same God appoints both conditions.* In our human view, they are very diverse; but in the Divine idea and purpose of them, they are but alternations of treatment necessary to our soul's health. They both come from His hand whose will is that the end should be blessed, though we proceed through part of our journey in pain. (2) *Consider that human helplessness and ignorance are a necessary discipline.* The purpose of these diverse ways of Providence is, that "man should find nothing after him." He is thus rendered incapable of piercing into the future, and, therefore, of managing it to serve his own purposes. Convinced thus of his own helplessness and ignorance, he is cast upon God that he may learn the lessons of humble dependence and of faith.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 8. This is a strange statement, and thoroughly false when applied to some things. 1. *It is false when applied to sin.* Sin to man, in its first stage, is a comparatively pleasant thing. The fruit to Eve was delicious; the thirty pieces of silver in the hands of Judas, at first, were prized; but the end—how sad! Sin begins in pleasure, but ends in pain; begins in music, but ends in groans. 2. *It is false when applied to unwise enterprises.* The first stages of a mercantile or a national enterprise, to the projector, are pleasant. But if the methods of action are unwise, the enterprise will soon prove to be a house built upon the sand. 3. *It will not apply to partial reformations.* When reformation has not been effected on right principles, there comes an apostacy. Certain devils, in the form of habits, have been expelled, but the mind is left empty. The evil spirit at length returns, bringing with him seven more devils; "and the last state of that man is worse than the first." But there are some things to which these words will apply. 1. *They will apply to an honest and persevering search after truth.* At the outset of all investigations, the mind is often harassed with doubt, and perplexed with difficulties; but as it proceeds, things appear more reasonable, obstacles are removed, and the mist gradually rolls off the scene. 2. *They will apply to the history of Christianity.* It came from despised Nazareth, its founder was the son of a carpenter, who died a malefactor. Systems, institutions, kings, and peoples were against it. But its end will be better. It is fast moving on to universal dominion. 3. *They will apply to true friendships.* Most true friendships at their outset have trials. But as it proceeds, mutual knowledge, mutual excellence, mutual love increase, and the twain become one. 4. *They will apply to the life of a good man.* This may be illustrated by three remarks:—I. **At the End of his Life he is Introduced into a Better State.**

1. *He begins his life amidst impurity.* Tainted with sin, at the beginning; but at the end, he is introduced to purity—saints—angels—Christ—God! 2. *He begins his life on trial.* It is a moral battle; shall he conquer? It is a voyage; shall he reach the haven? The end determines all. 3. *He begins his life amidst suffering.* "In this tabernacle we groan, earnestly," &c. II. At the End of his Life he is Introduced into Better Occupations. Our occupations here are threefold—*physical, intellectual, moral.* All these are of a painful kind. Toiling for bread—grappling in the dark with the mere rudiments of knowledge—mortifying the flesh. But death introduces us to those which will be congenial to the tastes, and honouring to God. III. At the End of his Life he is Introduced into Better Society. Society here is frequently *insincere, non-intelligent, unaffectionate.* But how delightful the society into which death will introduce us! We shall mingle with enlightened, genuine, warm-hearted souls, rising grade above grade up to the Eternal God Himself [*Homilist*].

However severe the afflictions of the righteous may be, the end is always in their favour. The end is their proper inheritance, of which no calamity can deprive them.

The end, for the righteous, will be the verification of those great truths which are here but dimly seen by faith.

If we are faithful, the darkest events of Providence will approve themselves to us in the end, which will be a revelation of the righteous ways of God.

It is only at the end that we can sum up fairly, and weigh the value of all things.

A patient spirit comes in aid of the decisions which wisdom is disposed to pronounce. It takes time to reflect, instead of giving way to the first headlong impulse. Pride lends fuel to feed the flame of passion and violence. Patience keeps down the fire and quells the tumult, and thus secures for wisdom the leisure and the calmness which, in such circumstances, it so especially needs, in order to judge righteous judgment [*Buchanan*].

Pride has a short-lived triumph, patience an eternal reward.

The gate is low through which we pass into the distinctions and honours of the kingdom of God.

Verse 9. Righteous anger, which alone is lawful for us, is slowly raised; is conformable to the measures of reason and truth, and endures no longer than justice requires. It expires with the reformation of the offender. It is rounded by pity and love, which, like a circle of fire, increases towards the central space until the anger itself is consumed.

Frail man, who has so many faults of his own, and stands in need, on every side, of favourable interpretation, should be very cautious how he indulges himself in the dangerous passion of anger. A wise man herein will observe a legal calmness and sobriety.

Cases are not only supposable, but of no unfrequent occurrence, in which the emotions of anger may be fairly justified. Yet it is one of those passions for which a person feels afraid to plead, because it requires, instead of encouragement and fostering, constant and careful restraint; and the propensity in every bosom to its indulgence is ever ready to avail itself of an argument for its abstract lawfulness, to justify what all but the subject of it will condemn, as its careless exercise, or its criminal excess . . . . To retain and foster it is a mark of a weak mind, as well as of an unsanctified heart [*Wardlaw*].

It is one of the gracious and encouraging testimonies which Scripture has given us concerning God, that "He is slow to anger" (Neh. ix. 17), and that "Neither will He keep His anger for ever (Psa. ciii. 9). And yet what infinitely greater cause God has for being angry, and for retaining His anger against us, than we can ever have in the case even of our most offending fellow-men! Did His wrath burn and break forth against the sinner as suddenly and vehemently as does the sinner's wrath against his offending brother, there is not a day nor an hour in which the sinner might not be consumed [*Buchanan*].

With the wise man, anger is a strange and suspicious guest, ready to be cast out upon the first confirmation of his evil intent. But with

the fool anger has a congenial home.

Where anger is indulged it will lead all the other passions to mutiny, and render any wise self-government impossible.

Verse 10. The dreamy admiration of antiquity is the refuge of weak minds, the futile justification of their discontent. They despise actual life around them and the ways of duty as too prosaic, thus injuring their moral force by the excesses of the imagination.

If we follow the fancied superiority of past ages with a sober and impartial eye, we shall find that it retires into the region of mist and fable.

Some Christians mourn over the lack of spirituality and earnest purpose in the Church of the present. They sigh for the ideal perfection which marked primitive times. But a closer examination would soon dispel this illusion. Even in the times of the Apostles, the passions of human nature, and the infirmities of the human mind, both disfigured the life of the Church, and corrupted the truth.

The golden age for our race lies in front of us, and not behind. Humanity is ever toiling up the heights of progress—from evil to greater good.

Those who unduly praise past ages, fix their attention upon a few illustrious names, and challenge the present times for the production of their like. They forget that those famous men do not represent the average of their contemporaries, but stood at their head and top. Those moral heroes are but brilliant points of light scattered sparingly through the long dark vista of the past.

"Thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." 1. Thou art inquiring for the *cause* of what thou shouldst first ascertain with certainty to be a *fact*; of what possibly has no existence but in thine own distempered imagination, or partially unformed judgment. There has been no golden age in this world but the short period of paradisaical innocence and bliss enjoyed by the first progenitors of our since accursed race. 2. Consider that thou knowest the evils of former times only *by report*, whereas of present ills thou thyself feelest the pressure. By this feeling thy judgment is liable to be perverted. The sight of the eye is more impressive than the hearing of the ear. 3. In uttering thy complaints, thou art unwise: for thou arraignest in so doing the All-wise Providence of the Most High, who assigns to every successive age its portion of evil and of good. The complaints of a petted spirit are ungodly; and the inquiries of such a spirit are equally unwise in their principle, and delusive in their results [*Wardlaw*].

Verse 11. Wisdom can stand upon its own merits, and derives no additional glory from wealth. Yet by means of wealth, wisdom is commended to the minds of many.

Wisdom can do without wealth better than wealth can do without wisdom.

Ample possessions do but minister to the lusts of their foolish owner, and feed his self-importance.

Wisdom, as far as it can make use of wealth, is a "profit to them that see the sun," *i.e.*, to those who are free, and have the power to enjoy. But when the darkness of adversity comes, wisdom has reserves of strength, and riches of consolation hidden till then.

In the vocabulary of a very large class of men, wealth and wisdom mean pretty nearly the same thing. The wise man who knows everything but the art of making money they regard as a fool; while the millionaire who, with a lamentable deficiency of higher gifts, has continued to amass a fortune, receives all the deference due to the man who is pre-eminently wise. It can need no argument to prove that Solomon could never mean to lend any countenance to so gross a method of estimating the worth of things [*Buchanan*].

Verse 12. Wisdom is so conscious of her superior dignity and worth that she can afford to estimate, at their full value, all beneath her.

Wealth affords but a mechanical defence against adversity, giving way under the pressure of the greatest calamities. But wisdom changes the nature of the afflictions themselves, and altogether neutralises them.

Wisdom is a wall of defence, and money is a hedge. The thorns in the Gospel, which sprang up and choked the good seed, are by our Saviour expounded of the deceitfulness of riches; but that is when the thorns do grow among the corn, when the love of riches hath placed them in the heart, where the seed of spiritual grace ought to grow. Let them be kept out of the heart, be esteemed of as they are, outward things; then they are, as it were, a fence, a hedge unto a man whereby he is preserved from hurt. So they were to Job, by God's Providence over them (Job i. 10) [*Jermin*].

True spiritual wisdom not only ministers to the comfort and dignity of life; it is life itself. That which is true in a lower sense of human knowledge has its highest illustration in that knowledge which is eternal life (1 John v. 11, 12).

Of what avail are the splendours of wealth when the soul passes, bereft of all, into eternity? The riches a man leaves behind him raise the admiration of others; but the deep, solemn, essential question is, did they give him life? If not, they cannot be placed in comparison with the unfailing virtues of heavenly wisdom.

Money may defend its owner from a certain class of physical evils, but it can do nothing to shield him from those far more formidable moral evils, which bring ruin upon the immortal soul. It cannot protect him from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. . . . . But heavenly wisdom arms him against all these foes, and teaches him, as its first great lesson, what he must do to be saved; and it disposes him to choose that good part which shall not be taken away; and in so doing it enables him, humbly and calmly, to bid defiance to the devil, the flesh, and the world. In acquainting him with God, it gives him a peace which the world's greatest prosperity cannot confer, and of which its direst adversity cannot deprive him [*Buchanan*].

Verse 13. The conviction that the work is God's is enough for the pious soul.

The spiritual instincts of the righteous discern behind the dread forces of nature not only a personal will, but also a heart. He feels this, and is satisfied.

Our wisdom is baffled by the system of Providence, as well as our power. As we cannot resist the decrees of it, so we can find no principle to harmonise its apparent discrepancies. Our safety lies not in rebellion, but in patience, faith, and hope.

So terrible are the restrictions of human destiny, that man can have no perfect liberty here. The seeming disorders of life sorely chafe him. We must be born into another life before we can have complete emancipation and "glorious liberty" (Rom. viii. 21).

Solomon does not mean, in so saying, to teach or countenance the revolting doctrine of fatalism; he does not mean that we are to regard ourselves as being in the iron grasp of a remorseless power, in regard to which we have no resources but passively to leave ourselves in its hands . . . . It is His will—the will of the only Wise, Just, and Holy Jehovah, and not that of His ignorant, erring, and fallen creature, that is to decide what shall be. Let man, therefore, humbly and reverently acquiesce in what the Lord is pleased to ordain as to his earthly estate. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" [*Buchanan*].

When we are at home with God, in the "secret place of the Most High," our painful perplexity subsides in the presence of His love and comfort. The darkness of our sojourn here is but the shadow of His wings.

Verse 14. Our joy in prosperity should not be the selfish glorying in success, or the transports of gratified

ambition. It should be an act of worship, a glad recompense paid to heaven.

It is wisest, as well as most natural, to allow our feelings full play while they last. We cannot take in the idea of life as a whole; else the burden of duty and suffering would appal us.

"Consider" 1. The *Author* of your trials. Whatever be their nature, and whatever the instrument of their infliction, they are the appointment of Providence; they come from the hand of a wise and merciful God—who, in all His ways, is entitled to your thoughtful regard. "Consider" 2. The *cause* of all suffering. Sin is the bitter fountain of every bitter stream that flows in this wilderness. "Consider" 3. The great general *design* of adversity; to excite to self-examination, repentance of sin, and renewed vigilance, to promote the increase of faith, love, and hope, and spirituality of mind, and general holiness of heart and life [*Wardlaw*].

The alternation of joys and sorrows in human life is necessary to our soul's health. Our nature is too weak to bear an unvarying experience without being hardened or corrupted. We need to be startled into sudden surprises in order to keep our attention awake.

God so tempers His dealings with us as to make our probation a stern and serious thing. He thus keeps men in His own hands, so that they can find nothing where He has not willed it, or where His light does not show the way.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. *Verses* 15—22.

The Cautions of a Religious Philosopher.

I. Against Judging the Moral Worth of Men by their Outward Conditions. (Verse 15.) There are perplexing appearances in the moral government of God—a seeming confusion of right and wrong, as if the Supreme Ruler was indifferent to human conduct, and had no complacency in goodness. 1. *Moral excellence is sometimes associated with misfortune.* The just man perishes, notwithstanding his righteousness. He therefore is made to suffer all lesser evils beneath this extreme calamity. How often have the good been betrayed and persecuted, or condemned to obscurity and neglect! Some of the noblest souls on this planet are overwhelmed by adversity, and altogether unknown to the world. 2. *That wickedness is sometimes associated with prosperity.* The basest of men have occupied the highest places, and have been preserved to old age surrounded by all the appliances of luxury and pride. 3. *These moral discrepancies must be viewed in the light of religion.* The righteous man will perceive that, even through all these apparent irregularities, the great purpose of God is being accomplished. He will reflect that, after all, these disorders are of little significance to him. Even they are but "vanity;" they will soon be past, as far as he is concerned. Like his own life here, they are but a "vapour," and that even an appearance for a little time. These evils must be endured; but what does it matter, since life is so short? They are but a momentary speck upon the clear glory of eternity. The humble and enlightened soul will consider the bitter root of all these evils. 1. *He will look to the past.* In the history of human nature there is an evil somewhere—some primal transgression corrupting the origin of the human race. The burden of vanity is laid upon us on account of sin; and even the righteous, in many sorrows and in the painful necessity of dying, must pay the penalty. 2. *He will look to the future.* There is a higher revelation awaiting man. "That which is perfect" will come, and there will be a clear justification of all the ways

of God. No evil will offend those pure and holy souls who live in His sight. II. Against a Rash Estimate of the Divine Dealings with Man. (Verse 16.) This is not a caution against aiming at the highest excellence in goodness or wisdom, for these are the proper objects of a righteous ambition. It is rather a caution against the conduct of those who presume to find fault with the methods of God's dealings with men, as if they could devise and conduct a more satisfactory scheme. This is the most daring form of human arrogance. 1. *It is the result of a proud righteousness.* There is a dangerous refinement of rectitude and wisdom which is bold enough to venture a criticism on the moral government of God. Vain man has assumed an over-nice delicacy of moral principle, leading him to indulge the suspicion that he could surpass his Maker in righteous and wise administration. We have here the germ of that Pharisaism which appeared in the days of our Lord. The same error underlies both the earlier and the latter stages of this religious vice—the want of humility. We are warned against the temptation (1) *To re-judge the Divine justice.* We may imagine that things would be better in our hands, that there would be a more equitable distribution of good and evil. But our weakness and ignorance sufficiently stamp this as impiety. (2) *To question the Divine wisdom.* We may, in our foolish fancy, build imaginary systems in which no imperfection appears, nor any risk or chance of failure. Such pride needs the rebuke, "Shall mortal man be more just than God?" (Job iv. 17.) Our knowledge is too limited for such a bold exercise as this. We have no basis of facts sufficiently broad, nor any experience of them sufficiently long and intimate, to warrant us in such an adventure. We are "but of yesterday," and, as a consequence, "we know nothing." Besides, there is our *moral disqualification.* Such impiety as this tends to ruin; "why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" Men who meddle with matters too high for them will receive some humiliating check, or suffer moral degradation and injury. But, 2. *The dread of this fault must not drive us into the opposite extreme.* (Verse 17.) It is not hereby intended to teach moderation in sinful actions. We have rather a precept which takes into account the sad fact of our sinfulness; and, regarding absolute perfection as unattainable (verse 20), counsels us not to cross the border-line which separates the good man—still subject to weakness and infirmity—from the open sinner. (1) *Such conduct would be destructive.* Vice, in considerable measure, brings its own punishment, by shortening human life and making it miserable. (2) *To avoid such extremes is the highest attainable excellence.* (Verse 18.) This is the "good" we should reach after, the only one possible to us. It is well if we can hit that happy medium which avoids the affectation of righteousness, on the one hand, and carelessness as to our moral conduct, on the other. (3) *Such excellence is only attainable by true piety.* "He that feareth God shall come forth of them all." He alone shall be saved from false righteousness and reckless immorality. A Divine hand alone can lead us in the safe way between these dangerous extremes. III. Against Building upon an Impossible Ideal of Humanity. (Verse 20.) Man might have some ground for boasting, and presuming upon his own wisdom, were he pure, and open to no impeachment of his goodness, or imputation of folly. But even the best are imperfect. Therefore, 1. *We need some defence against the Divine Justice.* Man has offended the justice of God, and must either receive the full force of the penalty, or provide a sufficient defence against it. We must accept the facts of our condition, painful though they be, and receive protection from the evils we deserve, as a gift of Divine mercy. 2. *Heavenly wisdom supplies the needful defence.* (Verse 19.) By "wisdom" is signified the pious fear and love of God. This is the only sure defence. We cannot avert or mislead Divine justice. However we contrive, we must come face to face with it at last. Man can build fortified cities, and brave heroes may defend them with valour and skill, and maintain a successful resistance against the enemy. But no ingenuity of device, or bravery of

resistance, can defend us from the inflictions of Divine Justice, if we are found without that wisdom which is godly and pure. IV. Against an Over-sensitiveness in regard to the Judgments of Others. (Verse 21.) Contrive how we may, men will think about us, and form some estimate of our character. 1. *We must pay some attention to such judgments.* The text refers both to praise and blame. We cannot be purely indifferent to either. Praise is the crown that society places upon the head of the good, the reward of brave and consistent virtue. Blame is often the index, pointing to some fault or defect in us; and a wise man will not neglect such indications. But, 2. *Such judgments must not excite in us any undue anxiety.* (1) *As to blame.* If we are right and pure in motive, aim, and purpose, we can afford to despise adverse judgments. We consider that such are compounded of ignorance, malice, and rage. (2) *As to praise.* It is often insincere; at best, fickle and inconstant. A wise man will receive it with moderation of desire and estimate. If we are too anxious to catch every breath of praise, we expose ourselves to the grief of bitter disappointment. A man may hear his own servant "cursing" him, while he is listening for the much-coveted praise. 3. *We should remember our own failings.* (Verse 22.) We ourselves are not faultless. We may have the painful consciousness of some defects of disposition, or of wrong inflicted upon others, which may provoke just censure, or retaliation. We may possibly have come slowly and late to the possession of heavenly wisdom, and in our days of folly, may have inflicted injuries whese effects still remain. We are candidates for a mercy to come, and must, therefore, be merciful to others. The censure we overheard, when we expected a word of praise, may have been uttered in a moment of passion; and though the sharp agony of the sting remains with us, the hasty word may have been soon forgotten by him who uttered it. We must make allowance for the imperfections of our fellow men, and cherish the spirit of moderation and forgiveness. Unless protected by the shadow of a mercy which must cover many faults (even in the best), we have much to fear from the judgment of God. The vision of that awful trial which awaits humanity, and from which there is no escape, should make us more reserved in our censures, and more merciful in our estimation of human conduct. Our sin is at the bottom of all the evils we suffer here, the moral disorders of the world, and of all the trials and vexations which accompany us throughout our probation. Given faultless men, and there would be a faultless world; the very face of nature and of life would be changed. Righteousness would work itself outwardly in a "new heaven and a new earth."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 15. If we estimate the moral worth of men by their surroundings, we should greatly mistake. Dives and Lazarus, in their environment here, presented the contrasted pictures of happiness and ease with want and misery. If with perverted eye, we see in the outcast of earth the outcast of heaven; or in the favourite of fortune the favourite of heaven; how soon is the illusion dispelled when death strips both of all their time-vestments to the bare essence of their souls, and to the simple attributes of character!

How often has it happened that the just man, who has laboured to promote some social regeneration, or to give the world a purer faith, has perished, the victim of intolerance! The thankless world has often rewarded its best teachers with the prison, the cross, and the stake.

He who is unscrupulous may rise to prosperity and undisturbed enjoyment, while the righteous perishes because he will not forego high principle. It is only in the "days of our vanity" that we can see the apparent failure of the

righteous, and the prosperity of the wicked. A far different sight will be presented to us in the stern realities of eternity!

Men who adopt a higher standard of duty than the rest of the world may have to suffer for it. The noble army of martyrs bears witness to this. He who adopts common views and principles may find life easy enough.

Verse 16. Those rulers are over-just who search everything too closely; and the theologians are over-wise who in matters of faith wish to direct everything according to their own reason [*Cramer*].

The boldest forms of impiety have assumed the garb of righteousness, in which men have dared to "snatch from His hand the balance and the rod."

Unless goodness is sufficiently guarded by humility, we are exposed to the danger of intellectual and moral pride.

There must be some fatal fault in any refinement of justice or wisdom which leads a man to entertain a suspicion of God.

The attempt to oppose the justice and wisdom of God by our vain imagination leads to destruction. "The words of Job are ended," says the inspired historian. All words spoken against God must sooner or later come to an end. Either grace forgives the folly of the speech—as in the case of Job—or God closes the impious mouth with violence.

The impiety here condemned has also an illustration in the government of human affairs, where it is often seen that, *Summum jus summa injuria.* Luther says, "He who would most rigidly regulate and rectify everything, whether in the State or in the household, will have much labour, little or no fruit."

Verse 17. As you would not be over-righteous, see to it that you be not over-wicked,—that is, that you do not contemn and neglect all government committed to you, thus letting everything fall into evil. It may be well to overlook some things, but not to neglect everything [*Luther*].

As there is a moral and intellectual activity which degenerates into impious speculation, so there is an inertness of conscience and of mind which issues in wickedness and folly.

As there are hazards attending high pretentions to wisdom, so there are risks peculiar to folly. The absolute fool becomes the object of contempt. His life is hardly thought worth an effort, far less a sacrifice, for its preservation. The fool is easily made the tool and the dupe of a party; exposing himself to be the prey of virulent enemies, or of selfish pretended friends. Folly leads a man into innumerable scrapes. It may induce him heedlessly to mix with wicked associates, and may thus occasion his suffering for crimes, in the perpetration of which he had no active hand, and which, fool as he is he would shrink from committing And in numberless ways he may come by his folly, to "die before his time" [*Wardlaw*].

Verse 18. By the fear of God we escape, on the one hand, the danger of Pharisaism, because, firstly, it awakens in the heart a dread of all attempts to deceive God by the trappings of a heartless show of piety, and because further, an energetic knowledge of sin is inseparably bound up with a true fear of God (Isa. vi. 5). We escape, also, on the other hand, the danger of a life of sin, because we cannot really fear God without also having a keen dread of offending Him by our sins, and a lively wish to walk in the ways of His commands [*Hengstenberg*].

The safe way of duty lies between dangerous extremes. Nothing but the fear of God can keep us from wandering to the utmost edge of hazard.

The fear of God springs from faith, and leads to that hope which expects all good from Him. If we believe in the character of God, as revealed in Scripture, we have everything to hope for. Fear is but the attitude of that caution which dreads to lose God, and by so doing, to lose all.

Our true safety lies not in dwelling exclusively upon the moral dangers to which we are exposed, but rather in "Setting the Lord always before us." Herein is the only condition of stability for our righteousness.

Verse 19. It is due to this inherent and immense superiority of intelligence and forethought, over mere numbers of animal energy, that the few in all ages have controlled the many—that a handful of cultivated and civilised men have triumphed over whole nations of barbarians. It is wisdom, in the sense of knowledge and intellectual skill, that has subdued the material world, and made it tributary to the convenience and comfort of mankind. . . . . It is not human science, however great its achievements may be, that he intends to celebrate. . . . . But more than these "mighty men," with all their skill and energies combined, could do for such a city, can wisdom do to strengthen its possessor against the devil, the flesh, and the world [*Buchanan*].

Our goodness is besieged on all sides. We can only hold out against the enemy by the might of a wisdom and courage which is stronger than that of the world.

The true heroes of our race are spiritual men, who have felt and dared to utter great truths. Other heroes have conquered enemies, yet have themselves been vanquished by deadlier foes! Spiritual men alone have conquered all. "The good fight of faith," is the only one that leads to any satisfactory and permanent result.

Verse 20. There is not even a just man—a justified man—upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not; that doeth good so exclusively and so perfectly as to be without sin. The law of sin which is in his members still wars against the higher law of his regenerated mind, and more or less at times prevails. But there is this grand and fundamental distinction between him and the impenitent and unbelieving, that the germ of a new and Divine life has been implanted in his soul [*Buchanan*].

The highest attainments in goodness come far short of absolute perfection. The best can only say with the Apostle, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" (Phil. iii. 12).

The boast of sinlessness can only arise from deplorable self-ignorance or spiritual pride.

The purest souls feel that they need some defence against the justice of God. Nature and Providence teach no doctrine of forgiveness; they often chastise without warning, and pay no heed to the excuse of ignorance. But spiritual wisdom is gifted with that insight into the character of God which beholds in Him infinite mercy and compassion. This is our only hope.

Verse 21. The wisest and best run the risk of being misrepresented and misunderstood. They often suffer exquisite pain through the malice and envy of others, and the proneness of mankind to indulge in careless talk. But he who follows conscience has no need to lay this seriously to heart. All the "wood, hay, and stubble" of human speech will be burnt up.

Consistent goodness will, in the end, triumph over suspicion and unfavourable judgments. The clouds that accompany the sun on his journey, hiding his bright head, often form at his setting a cushion of vermillion and gold on which he sinks down to rest. Enough for us if our evening sky be pure and lovely; we can afford to despise the passing shadows of our course.

Even wise and good men are often unduly fretted and disquieted by the harsh and uncharitable things that may be said of them in this censorious and envious world. They err in giving way to such angry or disappointed feelings. They forget that even the best of men have still many failings—that there is no perfection among our fallen race; and while this fact should remind them that they themselves are

not infallible, and that they may really have given some cause for the accusations of which they complain, it should also teach them not to form unreasonable expectations as to the conduct of others . . . . There is much point as well as truth in the familiar saying that eavesdroppers seldom hear good of themselves. They do not deserve to hear it. It is well that their craving curiosity and morbid vanity should be thus rebuked and humbled [*Buchanan*].

Extreme sensitiveness is one of the evils of ill-health. A robust strength and integrity of character will preserve us from many annoyances.

Verse 22. As we can boast of no absolute purity, we cannot take too high ground with humanity.

Those who crowd around the gates of mercy, as suppliants, have little need to recriminate one another.

Your own consciousness will prevent you from thinking it impossible that you should hear any evil of yourself; and it will, at the same time, teach you to make allowance for the passions and hasty speeches of other men [*Wardlaw*].

Expect injuries, for men are weak, and thou thyself doest such too often [*Richter*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 23—29.

The Confessions of a Religious Philosopher.

The Royal Preacher, approaching religion from its speculative or philosophic side, has some sad confessions to make. **I. That the Search for Wisdom is Difficult.** (Verses 23, 24.) His search is represented as most complete, marked by earnestness, the Royal thinker urging himself to it by a strong effort of the will. "I said I will be wise." The plan of procedure was most complete and exhaustive. It was no surface inspection—no mercenary work. He "applied" his "heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom" He tried to discover what lay behind all appearances, "the reason of things"—that deep insight which would reveal to him perfect order and harmony. In his speculations, he used variety of method, approaching the subject from different sides. Virtues were contemplated in their opposites. With a painful revulsion of feeling, knowledge was obtained from the morbid anatomy of sin. "Wickedness" and "folly," "foolishness" and "madness," are not inviting subjects, but they are facts of human life, and must be investigated by all who would speculate upon the state of man. Here is a search after wisdom most energetic and complete. Whence does the difficulty arise? In general, it arises from the vast dimensions of the subject of investigation. But these dimensions are here contemplated in two directions. 1. *In their surface.* The knowledge of man—his duty and destiny, and of the mysteries of religion—forms a subject extending far beyond our mental sight. We see and explore our narrow circle all around, but it is bounded by darkness, clouds, and shadows. If we adventure far, and the scene opens out before us, yet it closes behind us! We cannot chase the darkness away. The surface which we are permitted to explore is painfully limited. Like the end of the rainbow, where fancy has placed a golden cup, the prize of absolute wisdom is unattainable by man. The most successful explorer must make the confession, "It was far from me." 2. *In their depth.* "Exceeding deep, who can find it out?" Even that which is before our eyes, when we attempt to fathom it, proves too deep to be sounded by our plummet. Great secrets lie there hidden from mortal sight. Even the commonest objects are mysterious, and lie on dark foundations, quite inaccessible by us; and therefore how remote from our reach must be the ultimate mystery of God and man! **II. That the Results of the Search are Humiliating.** They are but poor, scanty, and unsatisfactory. And

this, 1. *In a speculative view.* The gains of our search after wisdom, regarded as an intellectual effort, are but small. We meet with some success, and obtain considerable insight into man's life and destiny. But the goal of *absolute wisdom* is as far off as ever. We can only express the little that we know in broken accents. Our different movements of thought come into frequent collision. Partial wisdom—mere fragments of knowledge—are all that we have—crumbs from the table. 2. *In a practical view.* In this direction, our search after wisdom is more plentiful in results. We gather more facts and principles. But how sad and humiliating are these! We have been investigating evil, disorder, the force and terrible complications of temptation—all the melancholy facts of human nature under the influence of violent passions and unworthy motives. We have here a recital of some of these sad facts. (1) *That there are some special dangers to virtue.* (Verse 26.) There are temptations in life which have elements of special danger. They deceive by treacherous arts, and the unsuspecting sinner, at first pleased with the siren song, delays, yields to the enchantment, and is lured to his destruction. That book of practical and prudential wisdom, the Proverbs of Solomon, is full of warnings against the seductive arts of women. Their lascivious looks and foul embrace are here described as "snares," "nets," and "bands." An easy virtue is soon entrapped and overwhelmed. The Serpent first approached man through his weak side, and she who was first deceived more easily deceives others (1 Tim. ii. 14). This portion of humanity, when loosened from the restraints of social morality and religion, presents the most pitiable forms of degradation, and one of the chief dangers to virtue. Special help from God is needed to escape these dangers. "Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her." (2) *That the highest moral excellence is rare.* (Verse 28.) The Royal Preacher professes an extensive knowledge of human nature. He is satisfied with no hasty glance, obeys not the impulse of first impressions, but acquires his knowledge by slow and painful steps. He searches out his facts "one by one," summing them up with a cool and severe judgment. (Verse 27.) As a standard of comparison, he takes man as he came pure from the hands of his Maker, before his glory had fallen—God's idea of humanity. He confesses that no one reaches this absolute standard of sinless purity and perfection. Among *men*, he had found "one of a thousand," in some sense, worthy of the name—one who approached the Divine idea within some computable distance. But among *women*, he had not found one worthy of the name, in the primeval ideal. "That he never found such a one, consequently that he considered the whole female sex as vicious, and highly corrupt, cannot possibly be his opinion, as appears from Verse 29, as also in Chap. ix. 9. But that moral excellence, taken as a whole, is much more rarely found than among men, that sin reigns more uncontrolled among the former than the latter, and in the forms of moral weakness and proneness to temptation, as well as in the inclination to seduce, to deceive, and ensnare—such is clearly the sense of this passage" [*Lange*]. 3. *That man must sigh in vain for a lost Paradise.* (Verse 29.) That perfect uprightness, that moral integrity of man in his primeval state, is but a splendid fact of the past, a sad remembrance of what once was, but is now no longer. There will, indeed, be a restored Paradise for man, but it will not be the same as that which was lost. Fallen man may attain a better estate than that which he forfeited, yet his final honours and distinctions will be those of one whose fortunes have been repaired, and not of one who has preserved his inheritance as he received it from the beginning. The dispensation of mercy itself cannot obliterate the sad facts of sin. Surrounded and penetrated by evils, our spirit can only sigh for the past, "God hath made man upright." 4. *That man makes the evils which trouble him.* "They have sought out many inventions." The sad moral calamity of our race has not destroyed human activity. The powers of our nature still exert themselves with restless effort, but they have taken a

wrong direction. They are fruitful in those "inventions" which, though marked by fertility of device and skill, are yet hurtful, and are but great powers altogether misused. The Religious Philosopher does not dwell here upon external actions, but goes rather to their spring in the perverse thinkings of the mind. The devices of natural reason—useless or impious speculations—have often corrupted and confused the truth. Instead of receiving Divine wisdom with the simple instinct and faith of childhood, man follows his own dazzling speculations, and the higher knowledge is hidden from him. (Matt. xi. 25.) These perverse thinkings are the seed from which the evil of the world springs, for sin works from within outwardly, from thought to act. The assumed superiority in moral strength and excellence, which man may have over the woman, is but a short-lived and unseemly boast in the presence of that sinfulness which belongs to all the race.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 23. The true teacher must be a constant learner. He can only impart what he has gained by trial and exercise.

Though the effort is beset with tremendous difficulties, yet the resolve to be wise, at all hazards, is noble and praiseworthy.

Our study of the mysteries of God, man, and nature, is not altogether barren of results. We are able to "know in part." We gather a few facts, and by a kind of prophetic insight, frame those portable and convenient statements of them called hypotheses and laws. But even the wisest must confess that the ultimate mystery is as far off as ever.

There are some fixed stars whose distance is so great, that when observed from the extremes of the diameter of the earth's orbit, they show no change of direction; thus affording no data for the calculation of their distances. If we could get nearer to them, then we should discover how far off they are. He who has approached the nearest to the great secrets of God and this universe, is most of all conscious how distant he is from absolute wisdom.

The goal of intellectual wisdom lies so far off that the hope of attaining it can impart no solid satisfaction. But there is a Divine word which is ever nigh unto man; yea, in his heart, and ready to break forth from his mouth. We need not seek for it in the height of heaven or in the abyss (Rom. x. 6—8).

He had said, indeed, "I will be wise." He had set his heart on understanding all mysteries and all knowledge. In that vain confidence to which at one time he had given way, he had imagined himself to be equal to the task of unlocking every secret, whether of nature or of Providence, and of leaving no difficulty unexplained. Time and the trial had undeceived him, and had taught him to form a humbler and juster estimate of the powers that are given to man. . . . . The dark problems which he had thought to solve remained, many of them as far from solution as ever. Such was the experience of Solomon, and such will, and must, be the experience of every finite mind [*Buchanan*].

Verse 24. Neither the wide range of subjects with which the intellect can grapple, nor its power of penetrating their depths, can put us into the possession of those secret things which God has reserved for Himself.

The infinite superiority of God renders it necessary that many things be concealed from man. Such mystery and reserve are the life of adoration.

Though Revelation is clear on all matters of practical duty, yet it presents truths whose mysterious depths it does not illumine. Such are the eternity and immensity of God — the mystery of creation—the existence of evil under a holy and righteous government—the dealings of God with men in Providence and in grace.

We can have no true happiness if we wait for perfect satisfaction of the intellect. We can only comprehend God through love. Neither height nor depth can vanquish or distress him who has the love of God in his heart (Rom. viii. 39).

Wisdom is so far off that it is not known from whence it cometh, nor where the place of it is (Job xxviii. 20). It is so deep that the depth saith it is not in me, and the sea saith it is not with me. It is so far, that the weakness of man's understanding is overwearied before it can come unto it; so exceeding deep that the eyes of man's understanding is dazzled to look into it, and man's wit is endangered by venturing into it. It is *deep and deep*, as the original expresses it—deep to men, deep to angels [*Jermin*].

Verse 25. Wisdom does not yield her treasures to the indolent, but only to minds accustomed to earnest and patient toil.

Truth is so often mixed with error, so completely confused and disguised by that which has gathered around it, that it is only traced out with difficulty and cleared from the entanglement.

We must not be satisfied with the simple observation of facts; we should try to discover their causes, or the principles they illustrate. It is the glory of the human intellect that it can contemplate laws, and does not depend upon the limited information gained from passive impressions.

However painful the task may be, the great teachers of mankind must investigate the causes of the chief dangers to virtue.

There are some forms of human evil so bold, full of wild passion, and irrational, that they stand out like mountains on the scene of the world's guilt.

That which is truly good is more clearly seen when we consider the evil that is contrary to it. The beauty of holiness, and excellency of saving knowledge, is illustrated, and best seen, when the deformity of sin, the madness and unreasonableness of those courses which natural men take to come at their imaginary happiness, are compared therewith [*Nisbet*].

Verse 26. To know the wickedness of folly, the wickedness and foolishness of madness, seems equivalent to knowing the worst species of it. . . . . In his own wild career he had come in contact with folly, and he had himself wrought folly of many sorts. And now, comparing all these one with another, so as to ascertain to which of them the pre-eminence of evil should be assigned, this was the conclusion at which he had arrived. These terribly significant words point plainly to the same seducer of whose base and destructive arts so startling a picture is given in Chap. vii. of the Book of Proverbs [*Buchanan*].

How strong the expression—"whose heart is snares and nets!" signifying the multitude of her devices of temptation, and the consummate skill, the secrecy, the address, the guile, with which she uses them for the accomplishment of her purposes. Her very "heart is snares and nets," in whose intricate and entangling meshes the fascinated and deluded soul is taken captive to its destruction. "And her hands as bands." Her powers of detention are equal to her powers of allurement. Her heart is a net, to entangle the unwary; her hands as bands, to hold him fast when her wiles have proved successful. So irresistible is the power, operating like the spell of enchantment, by which she retains under her influence the hapless victim of her charms [*Wardlaw*].

The most pleasant fountains of sin turn, in the end, into the bitterness of long regret.

Education and culture—the restraints of human prudence, may do much to preserve the maintenance of the highest virtue, in the face of the most insidious allurements. But religion furnishes the highest motives, the most powerful restraints. The noble ambition to

stand well in the sight of God is the only trustworthy sentinel of virtue.

By "the sinner" is meant one who is thoroughly vicious—with whom the practice of evil is habitual. With such the power to resist temptation grows less, and they become an easy prey to every pleasurable sin.

Verse 27. Sin cannot be treated by vague generalities, the forms of it are so many and diversified. We must descend to particulars in order to make a deep impression.

Even the most patent facts should not be treated as known upon a mere surface inspection. The real knowledge of them can only be gained by minute investigation.

Knowledge comes not to man by sudden irradiations, but by slow degrees—by adding, arranging, and reflecting.

Verse 28. Much is gained by the diligent seeker after wisdom—many facts, principles, lessons, and warnings; but the full possession of wisdom is not permitted to man.

Men of the highest qualities of mind and soul, powerful in word and influence, are but rarely found. There are but few stars of the first magnitude.

The strong expression of a truth brought home to the soul by sore experience, may easily wear the appearance of harshness and exaggeration.

The Preacher may refer to woman in regard to her attainments in Divine wisdom. The superior delicacy of her natural sensibilities often give her the advantage of an immediate and vivid perception of truth, to which man attains chiefly by the slow and laboured processes of the mind. Yet this power, when directed into wrong channels, shows a faculty just as strong in embracing error and superstition. It must be confessed that the natural weakness of woman has contributed, in no small measure, to the spread of these evils. They have too often been the natural home of frivolities both in life and religion. Though the Bible records the praise of many noble women, yet the fact remains that an inspired Apostle thought it necessary to warn the Church against dangers arising from this source (1 Tim. ii. 12. 1 Cor. xiv. 34). They are the easy dupes of false teachers (2 Tim. iii. 6).

Never, perhaps, has there been any period in the history of the visible Church of God, and certainly never in these more modern times, concerning which we are best informed, in which the majority of those who lived in the fear and love of God were not women. Solomon is here evidently speaking, and that as a humbled penitent, of his own particular case. He had loved "many strange women," outdoing, in this respect, the laxity and the luxury of the heathen monarchs around him. . . . Is it any wonder that in such a household, even among the thousand he had gathered into it, one solitary example of real goodness could not be found? Among his male attendants and courtiers, gay and dissolute as the society of the palace had become, one might now and then be met with who had not forgotten the piety and integrity of other and better days [*Buchanan*].

Verse 29. The present evils of man are not to be charged upon his Maker.

However rude and vague the commencement the Creator may have given to inanimate matter, as the God of souls He must needs produce His own image in fit perfection.

"Upright," 1. As to his mind. It was a plain mirror wherein the images of truth were reflected without distortion. The knowledge he possessed was, in its kind, perfect and pure, unmixed with baser matter. 2. As to his affections. They were fixed on God. He was pleased and attracted only by what was noble and good. 3. As to his conscience. As an indicator, it was in a condition of perfect adjustment and delicacy. As an instrument of moral control, it had both the right and the power to rule. 4. As to his will. It had no perversity, no element of rebellion; but was easily

determined to that which was right and good.

The hurtful inventions—the evil arts and devices of the human intellect, are marked by endless complexity, variety, and skill. This is power ill-directed and misapplied; but still a power, great in its perversion and ruin.

The first Paradise will never return; for the past never returns to us, bringing the same features as those long since vanished. But by that Divine mercy which triumphs over all difficulties, and through them educes a greater good, there will be for man a better Paradise than the first.

We read that in the future Paradise there will be a "tree of life," but no "tree of knowledge." "The glory of the Lord did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." The mind will then allow God's light to shine upon it instead of working out its own devices.

The actual existence of moral evil is too notorious to admit of a moment's question. The Bible account of its origin did not cause it; it existed independently of the revelation which informs us how it began; and the rejection of that revelation neither removes nor mitigates it, nor disencumbers it, in the slightest degree, of its embarrassing difficulties. On the contrary, revelation alone, whilst it assumes and proceeds upon the mournful fact, provides a remedy; all other systems, finding human nature in ruins, leave it as they find it. Revelation rears out of the ruins a magnificent and holy Temple to the God of purity and love [*Wardlaw*].

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. The boldness of his face shall be changed.**] Folly, in the form of selfishness, imparts a fierce aspect to the features; but wisdom graces them with a superior refinement. **2. The King's Commandment.**] The Preacher falls back upon his authority as a king, striving to realise what is the Divine idea of the ruler of men. **And that in regard of the oath of God.**] An appeal to God as witness to that promise of obedience which every subject virtually makes to the king—the obligation of obedience strengthened by the sanctions of religion. **3. Be not hasty to go out of His sight.**] A becoming demeanour must be observed in the presence of the King. If he is not favourable to our petition, we must not show our vexation and disappointment by retiring from his presence with indecent haste. **Stand not in an evil thing.**] Do not excite His anger by the appearance of stubbornness, as if he could be forced into compliance by our stern attitude and bold persistency. **5. The Commandment.**] "The word of a king." (Verse 4.) The expressed will of an earthly authority as representing the Divine. **Shall feel no evil thing.**] Shall have the protection of the laws. **A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.**] The wise man will modify the common obligation to obedience, by reason and conscience. It may be his duty to resist. **6. Therefore.**] Best rendered by *Although*. The meaning is, that notwithstanding the present misery of man, in the ways of Providence towards him, there are appointed times. Deep and wise purposes lie behind all this apparent confusion and disorder. **Is great upon him.**] The form of the word implying something laid upon him as a heavy burden. **7. When it shall be.**] The marginal rendering is to be preferred—*how it shall be*. **8. Neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.**] *Lit.*, its possessors. Opposition, though it may appear for a time to be victorious, will at length prove to be of no avail. This is the principal thought of the verse, and the fit conclusion of the entire section. **9. There is a time when one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.**] This was the definite direction of the Preacher's observations. He tried to discover what were the prevailing disorders of the time, and he beheld a whole epoch filled with examples of tyranny. **10. The place of the holy.**] Some understand the place of judgment. Others, the place of honourable burial, where men came and went in funeral procession. But it is more in accordance with the sense of the passage to understand it of the sanctuary, or the community of the righteous. These wicked

men concealed their true character beneath the outward forms and proprieties of religion. **12. And his days be prolonged**]—*i.e.*, in sinning. **13. Neither shall he prolong his days.**] Vice being unfavourable to long life; though, as in Verse 12, the time spent in sin, undisturbed by any seeming interference of Providence, may be considerable. **14. There is a vanity which is done upon the earth.**] These seeming anomalies in the moral government of God are part of that vanity to which man has been made subject on account of sin. **16. And to see the business that is done upon the earth.**] Travail, or torment; not business. Compare with Chap. ii. 26., and iii. 10. The painful labour of seriously considering human life and destiny. **Neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes.**] The "travail" is so earnestly carried on as to interfere with proper rest. **17. All the work of God.**] His universal dominion—the whole sphere of the Divine operation as observed by man. **He shall not find it.**] **He shall not be able to comprehend, or fathom it.** Compare with Chap. iii. 11, and vii. 24.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—5.

The Life of the Righteous Man in the State.

1. He Recognises Duties towards Constituted Authority. The wise man is he who has true spiritual knowledge, and who makes that knowledge the guide of his life. Such will endeavour to discharge all the duties arising from the several relations in which they stand to God and man. All are members of civil society, and therefore subjects under some form of human government. Certain duties are owing to those whom Providence has set over us in the State. 1. *The duty of loyal obedience.* (Verse 2.) If it is the will of God that men should exist in civil society, it must also be His will that there should be rulers, for these are necessary to the continuance and perfection of civil society. The actual rulers of mankind are in their places by that Providence which works in history. Properly constituted government affords that protection, and gives that opportunity, by which all the members of the State are able to fulfil their several duties. Our Lord and His Apostles taught that obedience must be rendered to rulers. Their memorable words on this subject must have acted as a powerful check, in the case of the first believers, to any tendency to exaggerate their Christian liberty; to which the temptation would be strong, on account of the corruption of existing governments. We should cultivate, 2. *A proper sense of the sacred obligation of obedience.* (Verse 2.) "And that in regard of the oath of God." Human authorities are called of God, appointed by Him, and fill their places, not on account of their own intrinsic excellencies or merit, but by His permission—by that act of Providence which has placed them where they are. We are under as sacred an obligation to obey them as if we had solemnly ratified the promise of obedience by a formal appeal to heaven. We should cultivate—3. *A delicate refinement of behaviour where duty has special difficulties.* (Verse 3.) In the king's presence it is proper to maintain a reserved and careful behaviour. If the king grants not our request, it is unseemly to show our vexation by departing from his presence in haste. On the other hand, we should not carry our firmness so far as to appear obstinate. We may have to sacrifice our own private feeling to that veneration which is due to office. The indulgence of improper tempers towards lawful authority might sow the seeds of rebellion far and wide. It is wisdom to study that behaviour which is proper to the occasion, and to avoid all that tends to imperil the safety and good ordering of society. We should cultivate —4. *A proper reverence and awe of authority.* (Verse 4.) Rulers, for certain ends of civil society, stand to us in the place of God. We owe them reverence

for the sake of their office, and should maintain a wholesome dread of the power committed to their hands. **II. Wisdom imparts Special Fitness for the Discharge of such Duties.** "He who is truly wise, who fears God, and reverences what is God-like in man, does not delude himself by impossible theories of human society. He possesses that practical wisdom which teaches him how to pass through life smoothly, to abstain from infringing the rights of others, and to labour for the promotion of the general good. The wise man is the best servant of the state. 1. *He has a better insight into the reasons and the nature of duty.* (Verse 1.) "He knoweth the interpretation of a thing" *Lit.* "of the word." To him the grounds of duty are clear; he is alive to the importance of social order, and brings to the consideration of law a correct moral judgment and the habit of obedience. The great principles of his life are adequate to all the requirements of right conduct between man and man, though they extend beyond it even to the realm of higher duties. 2. *He is the subject of a civilising and refining influence.* (Verse 1.) Wisdom is not only a power in the mind and heart, an inward and sacred adornment, but is also a power working outwardly, revealing itself in the style and bearing of a man, and lighting up his countenance with noble expression. It softens all that is repulsive, so that the countenance does not wear that fierce aspect which results from coarse ideas and a selfish heart. This refinement of beauty is an image of that social order and harmony which wisdom tends to produce. It is the pledge of the world's peace. 3. *His obedience to authority is discriminating.* (Verse 5.) He renders not a passive, a blind obedience, as if *every* command proceeding from merely human authority must be obeyed without questioning. It may be allowed that, in general, it is *safe* to obey. "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing." He who renders unquestioning obedience may save himself from many troubles. But if he makes this rule absolute, he may have to compromise conscience. Therefore wisdom must be employed to discriminate when human authority is in conflict with those higher duties which we owe to God. A wise man may have to resist the king's command, as Daniel did. An unreasoning, blind obedience is not taught in Scripture. Principle is dearer to the righteous man than safety and comfort. Where human and Divine authority are in conflict, his choice is made. He owes his highest allegiance to the "King of Kings."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. None is comparable to the wise man. He alone possesses that real and abiding treasure which cannot be gotten for gold.

The power to investigate the deep reasons of things imparts a majesty and stability to the religious life. The wise man is so fixed upon the solidities of truth that he is not carried about "by every wind of doctrine." Piety without intelligence is exposed to the dangers of fanaticism.

Wisdom, though an inward power, hangs out her ensign upon the human countenance.

The power of wisdom to elevate and refine its possessor is a kind of renewal of his physical nature, an earnest of the redemption of the body.

The beauty of the "human face divine" lies in its expression. The light of wisdom within beams in the countenance, imparting to it the attractive aspect of intelligence and sensibility. It is a mild and lovely light. It does not dazzle and overpower by the studied brilliance of self-display, but with soft and gentle radiance inspires delight, and wins affection; for of genuine wisdom, self-diffident humility is the invariable associate. Such wisdom gives to the countenance the expression both of dignity and grace [*Wardlaw*].

"Boldness" may, with greater strictness and accuracy, be rendered by "effrontery," or "arrogance." What Solomon seems to say is, that wisdom communicates to the face of its owner an aspect of meekness and gentleness very different from that air of imperious and boastful confidence which it once wore. None is so arrogant as the ignorant or half-instructed; none so unpretending as the man of largest knowledge and deepest thought [*Buchanan*].

Verse 2. Wisdom throws light upon every relation in which man is placed, and makes every duty to appear in clear definition. That book which reveals the highest truths does not disdain to give authoritative commands regarding the every-day work of man in the world.

"The powers that be are ordained of God," says St. Paul (Rom. xiii. 1). They are ordered and appointed by Him just as much as those who occupy the most sacred offices of the Church. Kings may be imperfect, but so were the Scribes and Pharisees who "sat in Moses' seat;" yet this does not destroy the obligation to hear and obey their lawful words.

The wise man's sense of duty to kings rests upon a higher motive than fear, or the love of security. It is with him a sacred obligation.

Since men must life in civil society, they have a right to consider *how* they shall thus live. The observance of the laws is necessary to secure the common good, and the king is but the living law.

Civil obedience is not a question between man and man merely; but, as we are here emphatically reminded, it is also a question between man and God. . . . . The same "oath of God" expressed or understood, by which the subject is bound to keep the king's commandment, limits and regulates the very obligation which it imposes. So long as obedience to the king's command does not involve disobedience to any commandment of God Himself, obedience is imperative. The oath of God exalts loyalty into a religious duty [*Buchanan*].

Verse 3. Our own vexation and disappointment should not destroy our proper reverence for those who represent the law.

A wise man will avoid everything in thought, temper, and action tending to sow the seeds of sedition.

Whilst your first and most sacred regard should be to the "oath of God," yet your own interest is also involved. You are in the king's power. He may degrade you from your station, deprive you of your emoluments, and inflict upon you such punishment as shall not be alleviated by the consciousness of its being undeserved. The headstrong passion that persists in evil because it cannot brook submission, is itself inexcusable, it may cost you too dear [*Wardlaw*].

Beware of rashly casting off allegiance to your lawful sovereign under any temporary influence of wounded pride or passion; or of being led away into sedition or rebellion by the specious plea of reforming the existing order of things. Ahithophel did this in the days of David, and he came, in consequence, to a miserable end. . . . Or, again, if any man have been seduced by evil counsel, or hurried by resentment or ambition into some unlawful attitude or act, let him not "stand" in the "evil thing." To persist is only to aggravate the offence, and to make its punishment more inevitable and severe [*Buchanan*].

Passion, whether in the form of haughty disdain or of stubbornness, is unfriendly to the proper discharge of duty.

Verse 4. Without power to enforce it, the law would be but mere advice.

The power of law and government is very great. The law never sleeps. It has a retentive memory, and it has long arms. Joab, proud and imperious, and confiding in the impunity which his position at the head of David's army appeared to give him, trampled on the king's commandment, but nevertheless

he found to his cost, in the end, that where the word of a king is there is power [*Buchanan*].

There is no appeal from the king's decree, as he acknowledges no earthly superior. Be it wise or foolish, good or evil, that decree must take effect. The victims of tyranny, suffering for a righteous cause, may indeed appeal to the Heavenly King; but that appeal cannot be heard till the final Judgment.

Authority could never command respect, or be invested with its fitting character of sacredness, if it were compelled to bear upon its very front a proclamation of the conditions upon which it might be set at naught. Hence the unqualified language in which Solomon speaks in this passage [*Buchanan*].

Verse 5. The true liberty for the subject is the liberty of law. Obedience is the condition of safety and protection.

There are times in which obedience to human laws has peculiar difficulty and perplexity for the wise man. But his wisdom disposes him patiently to wait, to watch the time and opportunity, and to judge soberly what conduct is right for him.

Our cause may be righteous and good, but if we lack discretion, our best designs must fall to naught.

Mistaken zeal is ever ready to precipitate events. But "he that believeth shall not make haste." He can afford calmly to wait.

There are *three* enquiries which the man of true wisdom is ever proposing to himself:—*What* should I do? *When* should I do it? *How* should it be done? He pays regard not only to the *matter* or *quality* of his actions, but to the *time* and the *manner* of them. He attends to circumstances in every department of his conduct; in imparting counsel, in administering reproof, in seeking the redress of grievances, in promoting needful improvements and reform;—never forgetting that success very often depends as much on the choice of a right season, and the adoption of a proper way of performing an action, as upon the action itself [*Wardlaw*].

What is fitting must be studied as well as what is right and good. A wise man observes the proprieties proper to the time, place, and occasion. St. Paul, while adhering firmly to principle, followed no unyielding methods of action; but by "becoming all things to all men," thus won many to Christ.

Even innocence is but a poor and insufficient protection in a world like this. The wisdom of the serpent is needed as the trusty sentinel of the harmlessness of the dove.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 6—8.

The Stern Dominion of the Supreme King.

We now turn from earthly kings and their narrow dominions to consider the Great Ruler over all. There are aspects of His government terrible to man. **I. He Uses an Inflexible Method.** (Verse 6.) In the government of God over nature and man, we observe a stern regularity which is calculated to inspire us with awe of some mysterious and inflexible power. All seems to us as one vast machine which moves on in invariable method, not knowing, not caring, what injuries it may inflict. In some moments of painful thought, it might seem to us that we are abandoned to the terror of some heartless and unsympathetic power. Some of these harsh aspects of God's government are here indicated. 1. *His purposes are already formed.* He does not enter upon His work with rudimentary and imperfect ideas, waiting for a wider experience and more certain knowledge. He uses no methods of trial and error; learns not, as we

are obliged to do, from failure and success. His purposes are formed once for all. 2. *There is an appointed season for their development.* The time is determined beforehand when the purposes of God shall be effected. They ripen slowly and await their proper season, nor can any human power force their growth. 3. *They appear to be carried on regardless of human woes.* Although "the misery of man is great upon him," this inexorable dominion continues. The wheel within wheel in the system of nature and Providence may raise our admiration, but their terrible regularity of movement and certainty of effect seem to spurn away imploring misery, and threaten to crush hope. Yet the wise man will discern a "reason" behind all these harsh appearances. Therefore he submits and waits. There is a "set time" also to favour him. **II. He Hides from Man Future Destinies.** (Verse 7.) No feeling does more to tame the human breast than our complete ignorance of the future. It is altogether hidden from us. 1. *As to what it contains.* "He knoweth not that which shall be." He cannot tell what events shall take place, what new scenes and changes shall be unfolded in the course of time. 2. *As to the manner of it.* "Who can tell him *how* it shall be?" He who has studied the past history of mankind with intelligence and calm reflection, can predict the general principles which future events shall illustrate. But in what time and manner those events shall take place, no human sagacity can foresee. This ignorance of future destinies strengthens, in the good man, the feeling of dependence upon God. It makes faith in the love of God a necessity of the religious life. The way may be dark before us, but if we fear the Lord, He will guide us tenderly with more than a father's care. The oppression of the future becomes light when we are strengthened by a sense of that "loving kindness which is better than life." **III. He Appoints for Man the Inevitable Hour.** (Verse 8.) However varied the fortunes of men, there is one event awaiting all. 1. *When the high summons arrives no power or skill can resist it.* Our breath of life is in the hands of God. He decrees the time when we shall breathe the last gasp, and when the heart's emotion shall be stilled. When He permits the last enemy to grasp us, there is no escape. Death knows no awe of rank, nor yields to bribes. That ruthless power cannot be softened by the voice of distressed affection, or forced to spare his victims by any arguments derived from the usefulness or beauty of their lives. No man has power to retain the spirit beyond its appointed time. Nothing can stay its flight when once it starts on the journey to God. 2. *There are no grounds upon which we can procure exemption.* On the eve of the battle, or when actually engaged in it, the soldier cannot obtain his discharge. No plea can avail him, no sacred demands of home or kindred. We are all under this inexorable law of war. When the stern command is issued, we must enter into the conflict; we can obtain no substitute, purchase no discharge. When summoned to enter the field in mortal conflict with the last enemy, there is no retreat. 3. *Rebellious opposition will not avail us.* "Neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it." Wicked men put forth wonderful energy in their evil deeds, but when God's time of judgment arrives, it is in vain that they resist.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 6. If, without the light of a better hope, we survey this scene of man, it would appear as if the Monarch of the world was indifferent to human miseries.

The skill and regularity displayed in God's works and ways would be of little comfort to us, if we were not assured that behind all there is a loving heart.

God works out His purposes slowly, and (as it appears to us) regardless of

the private griefs of men—yea, even of their highest necessities. The world had to wait long ages for the crowning revelation of God's mercy. Yet all this time men suffered the evils of ignorance, sorrow, and sin.

The degree of mischief, and disappointment, and wretchedness, arising amongst mankind from the want of wise consideration of seasons and circumstances, is beyond calculation. Were men in general more carefully attentive to these, a large proportion of the miseries of which they complain might readily be avoided. But some by their weakness, others by their heedlessness; some by their headstrong obstinacy, others by their excess of pliancy; some by impatient precipitation, others by procrastinating dilatoriness, and thousands in an endless variety of ways, are led to overlook "time and judgment," and to bring distress upon themselves, or others, or both [*Wardlaw*].

Verse 7. Our ignorance of the future should teach us—1. To be superior to the fear of man. If we have God on our side, how little, after all, can weak and ignorant man do to harm us! 2. That we should not envy the temporary prosperity of others. How soon their fortunes may be wrecked, and the evil time come when riches cannot deliver! 3. That we should seek Divine guidance. God will show us, even through all the miseries of the present, what is the path of life.

It is true that no man can tell "*what* shall be," and that neither can any one tell him "*when* it shall be;" but this is no reason why either the "when" or the "what" that may thus lie hidden in the inscrutable future should be to us a matter of no concern. It is not by being utterly careless and indifferent upon the subject that we can escape the evil that may be impending over us. It is true that we may aggravate that evil, or even create it when it has no actual existence, by tormenting ourselves with excessive or groundless anxieties and fears. As regards those futurities against which no foresight can provide, the part of true wisdom is to follow the counsel of our blessed Lord (Matt. vi. 34) [*Buchanan*].

Verse 8. The Royal Preacher had spoken of the power of kings (verse 4). Yet how limited is that power? They cannot resist the decree of the King of Terrors.

Death overwhelms the strength of man. It is the great terror of nature. The very thought of it must fill us with horror, unless we are conscious that the inward man is growing stronger day by day.

Man is sown in weakness here—a weakness most sad and manifest in his closing hours; but he is raised in power, which, if blessed by the vision of God, will be "the power of an endless life."

This is a field in which every man must advance; and every man must advance alone to single combat; and every man in succession must fall. The enemy to be encountered is himself invulnerabl; and whether the struggle be short or long, and however successful for a time our efforts may be to parry or to cover ourselves from his deadly thrust, he will, sooner or later, find his way with certain aim and irresistible force to every heart [*Wardlaw*].

Death can only destroy the body of our humiliation. Our permanent and immortal essence remains unhurt.

Death meets us everywhere, and is procured by every instrument, and in all chances, and enters in at many doors. . . . . And all this is the law and constitution of nature, it is a punishment to our sins, the unalterable event of Providence, and the decree of heaven. The chains that confine us to this condition are strong as destiny, and immutable as the eternal laws of God [*Jeremy Taylor*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 9—13.

The Delay of Divine Justice.

The Royal Preacher often insists upon the truth that God rules over man th an inflexible justice. Yet that justice does not act swiftly, but seems, for time, to be suspended. We have here three facts regarding this delay of the Divine Justice. **I. That it Continues, though the Worst Forms of Iniquity Prevail.** In every age there are prevailing sins whose enormity is so great that they may be said to provoke the Divine Justice. They cry to heaven for vengeance and retribution, yet that cry seems to be unheeded. Some of these sins are mentioned here. 1. *Tyranny and oppression.* (Verse 9) Man is enslaved to man. Those who have the power rule with a rod of iron, oppressing the poor and the defenceless. Cruelty, in some form, exists under every condition of society. The wrongs that men inflict upon one another are amongst the most terrible forms of human suffering. The permission of such evils in the moral government of God is a source of perplexity. It would seem as if heaven heeded not the groanings of the innocent, yet unavenged. 2. *Hypocrisy.* (Verse 10.) These tyrants disguised their wickedness under the cloak of religion. They went continually to the "place of the holy"—the Sanctuary of God—the assembly of the righteous. They dared to insult God in His own house. And yet this hypocrisy was suffered to continue, justice not interfering to cast forth these audacious men from the place which they had profaned. And not only during life, but even in death itself, did men attempt to hide these hollow pretences beneath the outward signs of reverence due to real worth. These wicked men were "buried" with all the pomp and circumstance of woe. Yet, with all the advantage of these external appearances, carried on even to the grave, they failed to deceive either God or man. "They were forgotten in the city where they had so done" Men soon recovered from any infatuation which their outward splendour might have produced. No deeds of love and kindness made them dear to memory, and the world soon consented to let their names die. The wickedness of those men was so manifest that they were hypocrites without deceiving. Posterity covered them with shame and disgrace. **II. That it Continues, though Some thereby are Emboldened to Sin.** (Verse 11.) In the moral government of God, as it is carried on in the present world, punishment does not fall upon the sinner speedily. Even that penalty with which some sins are visited in this life is often long delayed. It would seem as if sin was not interfered with—that there are in the world no sufficient tokens that the Divine Justice is likely to be exact and rigorous. This long-suffering of God, the design of which is to lead men to penitence, is perverted by some into a privilege to sin. The reason of this perversion is not hard to find. 1. *There is a feeling that God is indifferent to human conduct.* While justice delays, and the course of life seems to run smoothly, the sinner begins to imagine that the moral government of God is, after all, but an empty phrase. The weakness of our moral nature will take advantage of the most slender excuses to continue in a course of sin. Even good men are staggered by the delay of Divine justice to inflict penalty for the crying sins of mankind. In this painful perplexity, they can only find relief in faith, and present comfort in the patience of hope. The long-suffering of God is their salvation (2 Pet. iii. 15); but with the sinner, it only serves to wear down all moral distinctions, and to blunt the feeling of retribution. 2. *There is the excitement of success.* The schemes of those "wicked" men had prospered. They gained the object of their ambition. There is a powerful excitement in success. The world worships it and few men have strength enough to withstand the infatuation. In the

intoxication of success, the distinct colours of good and evil fade. Men become the slaves of the unreal. They heed not the solemn and sober facts of human destiny. III. That it will have an End in Just Retribution. (Verses 12, 13.) The penalty which God's law attaches to sin is not an empty threat, a vain terror held over the human race. A just retribution will come to all at last.

"The mill of God grinds slowly,
But it grinds exceedingly small."

There will be just retribution. 1. *For the sinner.* The most successful course of sin will have an end, when reckoning will have to be made with Divine justice. "It shall not be well with the wicked." He cannot have any final success. Sin must lead to unhappiness. God will banish it from His sight, and all what is banished from Him is bereft of peace and joy. 2. *For the righteous.* "It shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him." To "fear God" is the O.T. expression for the state and character of piety. He who is righteous before God does not pervert His kindness, in delaying to inflict the penalties of sin, into license for iniquity. Divine justice may be long delayed; in the meantime, the foulest sins grow rank; and even the good have painful moments of darkness, when faith is difficult; still, in the end, it must be well with the righteous, for God will honour and reward all who have meekly toiled that they might be partakers of the Divine nature.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 9. He who studies the moral condition of man in the world will find many stumbling blocks to his faith.

Power is a dangerous possession unless it is regulated by goodness.

Of this fact the system of slavery is still a conspicuous and terrible proof. That system involves, indeed, many and most formidable evils to its unhappy victims; and yet, enormous and intolerable as these evils are, they are exceeded by those which the system entails upon the men by whom it is administered and maintained. They, most emphatically, rule over others to their own hurt. Their moral sense is blunted, and all the better feelings of their nature depraved by the sights which the system compels them to witness, and by the deeds which it requires, or at least tempts them to do [*Buchanan*].

As the Lord doth for wise ends permit wicked men to come to authority over others in the world, so hath He the time when they shall come to it fixed, and how long they shall have it. For it is clear by the consequence of this ruling, to the person who hath it, that he speaks of wicked men, and the word *time* signifies a set and fixed season, wherein "one man rules over another" [*Nisbet*].

Verse 10. Death often solves the perplexities of the distressed. The oppressors of mankind are made to yield to the resistless stroke of fate, and so they "cease from troubling."

There is a form of hypocrisy which springs from ignorance. Men deceive *themselves*. But there is an hypocrisy which hides great depravity of soul beneath the appearance of goodness

"I saw the wicked who had come and gone from the place of the holy"—who had attended the sanctuary, joined in the worship of God, and cloaked their unrighteousness and oppression under the garb of external piety—who had "come and gone," continuing their hypocritical career in safety, no marks of Divine vengeance visiting them for their awful profanation and odious dissembling. I saw them *buried*,—the victims of mortality equally with others, having no power more than they in the

day of death. I saw them *buried*, carried in affecting humiliation and impotence, to "the house appointed for all living." . . . . They had sought after, and expected perpetual fame; but men had no pleasure in remembering them; when out of sight, they were out of mind; their name and memory rotted with their carcases in the dust [*Wardlaw*].

It has often happened that when the grave has closed upon great oppressors, that men have hasted to abolish their laws, and to sweep away all traces of their ambition and pride. In the better state of things which has succeeded, men have been glad to forget the tyrant's name.

"This also is vanity;" this, to make the inward substance of virtue a shadow of outward beauty. This, to have an opinion of holiness, and to be praised for it, but not to deserve it. This, to be flattered or feared being alive, to be hated being dead. This, being present to be remembered, being absent to be forgotten. This, to be Church Christians, the guests of hell in life and conversation. This, for a while to rule in pride and oppression, and for ever to be slaves to misery and torments [*Jermin*].

Verse 11. Whatever lies remote from us, in time, fails to affect the mind, or at best affects it but languidly. The delay of the inflictions of Divine justice thus becomes an occasion of indulging in a false security.

That which men wish to be true, they are naturally prone to believe. They are fond of thinking that sin will not expose them to such irremediable vengeance as the Bible threatens. They are willing to be persuaded of this; and they flatter themselves into the persuasion by the wiles of a thousand sophistries. At first, it may be, they commit sin with a timid heart and a trembling hand. They hesitate long. But at length, though with irresolute tremor, it is done. No harm comes to them. No indications of the anger of heaven follow the deed. They feel themselves safe. And having tasted of the sin, it is sweet; and they desire it again [*Wardlaw*].

It is the proper mark of an unregenerate man, void of saving knowledge and grace, to have his heart fully set in him, without reluctancy or remorse, to do evil. The regenerate have another principle within them, opposing their sinful motions (Gal. v. 17), checking and wounding them, and bringing them to remorse for sin (Rom. vii. 24) [*Nisbet*].

Verse 12. Sin becomes easier the more it is indulged. Fixed and intensified by the power of habit, it comes at length to be almost as strong as fate.

The sinner, in the long security which is permitted to him, may even seem to have Providence on his side.

The frequent success of the ungodly, and their apparent immunity from evil, may be a sore perplexity to the weak who suffer. Yet, if these look to the end, they will see that the good alone triumph.

There are great fundamental truths —moral axioms, which cannot be set aside by any difficulties of speculation. In the midst of mystery and apparent confusion they shine out clearly.

It is not a bare conjecture, or mere probability, that the godly have of their future happiness, but it is a certainty, and a firm persuasion wrought in their hearts by the Spirit of God, making them to rest confidently upon His faithful word, and helping them to believe by giving them the first-fruits thereof in hand [*Nisbet*].

Verse 13. "But it shall not be well with the wicked." Not while he lives, for even when he prospers it is ill with him: the curse of heaven is upon his tabernacle, and it secretly mingles itself with all his enjoyments. Not when he dies, for he has then nothing before him but "a fearful looking for of judgment." Not when he appears before the Judgment Seat, for "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous" [*Wardlaw*].

God's judgments come suddenly,

Men who have not faith see no signs of their approach. The prosperity and security of the wicked are but that strange and unnatural calm before a storm.

The triumphing of the wicked, at best, is but short. Their prosperity has in it no element of solid worth—nothing that will abide through the untried scenes and changes which await them. Their glory passes away as a shadow, completely dispersed by the light of eternity.

When God enters into judgment with the sinner, the vain show of his worldly life disappears.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—17.

Our Duty Under the Moral Discrepancies of the Present Life.

The origin of evil is a profound mystery, but not less so is the permission of evil. These exercise the wisest with painful speculation; they remain a difficulty and a sore trial, even for the best. Still there is a course of duty which is clear, and a light of faith which is sufficient. There are moral discrepancies in the present life (Verse 14), but they do not set aside great moral duties, and wise efforts to reach after a more satisfactory state of things, which God, in his own good time, shall bring in. Our duty is indicated here. I. We Should Feel their Temporary Character. "I said that this also is vanity." We see the wicked prosper as if they were rewarded for their works, and the good afflicted, and abandoned to cruel wrongs and oppressions, as if they were punished for their righteousness. We must survey this seeming confusion of right and wrong not with wild amazement, but calmly. It is our duty to explore our situation in the world, and to discover what course is best for us. The just man beaten down by calamity, while he beholds the wicked apparently enjoying the rewards of virtue, may feel a strange perplexity. But he has to consider that even this is "vanity." There is little in it to cause him any permanent anxiety or pain. He may reflect—1. *That these discrepancies exist under the rule of a Moral Governor who is both wise and good.* Physical and moral evil exist in the world. God is both wise and good. We must admit these two facts as beyond debate. However difficult their reconcilement may be, we are bound to believe that no disorders of this present time can obscure those bright attributes of the Divine Nature. The good man has faith in the character of God, and waits till He shall make all clear. 2. *Such a condition of things cannot be final.* To a narrow view, it might appear as if Providence was entirely regardless of moral qualities in human character; yea, as if the stamp of approval was affixed to wickedness. Yet God's meek and patient children know that these disorders cannot be endured for ever. They are but passing shadows, and the full glory of God will yet shine forth. The stern realities of things will appear in the light of eternity. Slowly the ages pass on for us; but to the eye of God they are but as "yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." 3. *These moral discrepancies have no practical significance for us.* If we are the true and faithful servants of God, these things to us are mere vanity. They amount to nothing. If we have a lively sense of the eternal verities, we can afford to despise them. What do they signify for us, since life is so short, and the scenes of retribution so soon to be unfolded? With such a thought, St. Paul consoles Christians even in slavery; "Art thou called being a servant (*i.e.*, a bond-servant—a slave)? care not for it" (1 Cor. vii. 21). Nothing is of practical significance to the good man but those things that abide. II. We should Enjoy with Contentment the Blessings that Remain. (Verse 15.) The disordered condition of things may be puzzling, yea, in some of their aspects, disheartening, but there are present blessings. There are great facts and duties appearing in clear light. There is

enough left which we may contentedly and soberly enjoy. 1. *This enjoyment is reasonable.* "Then I commended mirth because a man hath no better thing under the sun." This is the best and most reasonable course for us, to cultivate a cheerful spirit which gladly enjoys whatever lies within its reach. In the worst state of things, there are some blessings remaining; and if God is the portion of our inheritance, we cannot be entirely destitute. Anxious care only brings torment, and leads to no good. It is the highest prudence to make the best of what lies before us. Besides, the godly are sustained by the consciousness of the good that is reserved for them. 2. *It is the safe course.* "For that shall abide with him." Changes occur in the outward conditions of life, but the habit of cheerful gratitude abides with a man. It is to him an accession of spiritual treasure which the most disastrous reverses of fortune cannot alienate. 3. *It is godly.* The mirth here commended is not the coarse, thoughtless mirth of the children of this world, but that joy which flows from piety. It is the cheerful acceptance, on the part of the righteous man, of those blessings "which God giveth him under the sun." Such a man hath faith in God, and is distinguished by that elevation of character which comes of taking a large and comprehensive view. III. We should Abstain from Fruitless Speculations. (Verses 16, 17.) To enquire into "the business that is done upon the earth" is to investigate the "travail" that is connected with human life, action, and fate. But a wise man will not allow such speculations unduly to distress his mind, or to attract him from the paths of humble duty. We may say of such enquiries, when pushed beyond the bounds of soberness, 1. *They are a wearisome effort.* They may be carried so far as to interfere with present enjoyment, and even to rob us of the needful rest of sleep. (Verse 16.) 2. *They are a profitless effort.* (Verse 17.) The bottom of the mystery cannot be reached by the greatest labours of the wisest. To know "all the work of God" completely is far beyond our depth. God's great secrets lie hidden. 3. *They lead to no good practical result.* That restless curiosity and impatience of mystery, which is the temptation of some minds, does but weaken the capacity for duty and humble trust in God. In the mazes of speculation a man may lose the clear sight of what lies before him. It is best to do what is close at hand, and to await in faith and hope the disclosures of futurity. 4. *They interfere with our spiritual life.* It is the plan of God to begin with what is comparatively imperfect, and to proceed to greater perfection. Thus chaos was before order, and darkness before light. This life is but the commencement of our existence, and it is marked by imperfection. Yet this imperfection is necessary to the life of faith. The full vision, which the future shall alone disclose, would interfere with that life. If we can see but one step before us, it is enough. Light, in the fulness of it, is a reward "sown for the righteous." It is an "inheritance" reserved and guarded for us while we are in our minority, but into whose full possession we shall come when we have attained to the full manhood of our existence. Col. i. 12.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 14. Look at Joseph in the dungeon. He has been a disciple of heavenly wisdom. He has resisted a strong temptation to sin, and it has happened to him according to the work of the wicked. He is loaded with reproach and shame—he is left to languish in prison, either forgotten or despised. Look at Paul bruised and bleeding, when he has been all but stoned to death at the gates of Lystra, or writhing under the cruel and ignominious scourge at Philippi, or dragged through the streets and beaten by the infuriated populace at Jerusalem. Or, once more, take a far more illustrious example than either of these—look at Him who was the very impersonation

and living embodiment of wisdom. Was He not all His life long a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? Was He not despised and rejected of men? And did He not terminate His earthly career upon a malefactor's cross? [*Buchanan.*]

God rewards His people with better things than the perishing good of this life.

The righteous are often taught by the course of Providence that godliness cannot be turned to outward gain.

It is not certain that even the best men will have prosperity in this life, or any external reward of goodness. How vain then to set our hearts upon that which is not, and to lose sight of a certain and enduring reward!

The seeming confusion of good and evil in the world is part of the vanity of our present state. Faith sees this old order passing away and giving place to the new. The sons of God shall yet be delivered from this vanity.

Verse 15. The measure of a man's earthly prosperity, and of the success of his labour, is a matter of complete uncertainty, but a cheerful and contented spirit, disposed to enjoy whatever portion is sent, is a sure and constant blessing. The secret of happiness, as far as it depends on the things of time, is to enjoy prosperity cheerfully, and without the irksome and depressing apprehensions of an anxious mind, as long as it continues; and if it is lessened or withdrawn, still to receive our diminished and stinted supplies with the same cheerful and buoyant gratitude; thus making the best of that which, both in its degree and its continuance, is so proverbially uncertain. Amidst all changes, this happy frame of spirit may be preserved [*Wardlaw*].

Our labour is often in vain, our works perish; but the habit of cheerfulness, arising from the conviction that our portion of life is from God, abides with us. The possessions of the mind and soul survive all outward changes.

Of our labour, the most valuable remaining product—saved, as it were, from the wreck of it—is the spiritual dispositions which it has served to generate in us.

He who manifests the spirit of a pious and sober joy is imitating one of the qualities of the Divine nature. The reward of heaven consists in the entering into God's own joy.

The Preacher having spoken of the oppressions of the wicked, and of the troubles of the righteous, here he showeth a good remedy against them, and an excellent carriage in them. "Then I commended mirth;" when he had considered the troubles of man's life, then he commended cheerfulness as a thing worthy of praise in itself; he commended it unto men as a thing bringing much good unto them. And this it is which the prophet David commended, "Serve the Lord with gladness, come before His presence with singing" [*Jermin*].

Verse 16. That wisdom which is possible to man can only be attained by the earnest application of all our powers.

He who engages in the study of the condition and character of man has laid upon himself a difficult and painful task. He has accepted the burden of humanity, thus attracting upon himself the penalty of restless anxiety and the sorrows of a disappointing search after that which must for ever lie beyond his reach.

The unreflecting multitude, whose minds are never exercised on such questions at all, have no conception of the amount both of time and effort which it costs to master them. They do not know, though it is a fact, that there are men who, in handling such profound problems as the mysteries of Divine Providence, in connection with the state and prospects of the human race, present, "neither day nor night see sleep will their eyes [*Buchanan*].

Verse 17. There are works of God quite beyond the range of our observation, and which, therefore, we cannot fathom. But even those works of God

which concern human affairs, though they lie near and about us, are beyond our capacity fully to explore.

A wise man may be tempted to impatience of mystery, and thus weary himself with fruitless endeavours to rest on the much-desired ground of ultimate truths. But it is the highest wisdom contentedly to accept the fact of our ignorance.

Mere human reason could do nothing to explain the origin or the existence, under the government of an all-wise, almighty, and infinitely righteous God, of a state of things in which it should ever happen to just men to be treated according to the deserts of the wicked, or to wicked men to be treated according to the deserts of the righteous. There is no human philosophy that could ever have thrown one ray of true and satisfying light on an anomaly so great. Even divine revelation itself, though it tells us how it came to pass, does not tell us *why* this was permitted. That it was permitted for God's glory, we do indeed confidently infer and unhesitatingly believe, because that is and must be the grand final cause of all things. But still, as regards the principle that is to harmonize the existence of sin and misery in God's universe with the infinite perfections of His own being, it is altogether hidden from us—it is far above and beyond the grasp, at least in its present feeble condition, of any human mind [*Buchanan*].

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**2. One event.**] An equal chance or happening—the wisest and best having no special destiny (chap. ii. 14, 15, and iii. 19). Chance, in this use of the word, is not opposed to Providence, but is a term employed to signify the impotence of all human effort to secure any certain result. **He that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.**] The profane and frivolous swearer as well as he who respects the sacredness of an oath. **6. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished.**] The author keeps before him, for his present purpose, those gloomy views of the state of the dead belonging to the earlier revelation. The souls that are detained in the prison-house of death are regarded as having but a *quasi* existence, in which all thought and feeling have become so inert as to be scarcely perceptible. A loftier conception of the destiny of the human spirit after death is given in chap xii. 7. **8. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.**] No literal observance of these circumstances of external appearance is intended; but rather an exhortation to indulge those calm and pure emotions of joy, of which white garments and a face which oil causes to shine are the well-known symbols. **10. For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.**] This may be compared with the saying of our Lord in John ix. 4. **The grave.**] The unseen state to which thou art hastening. **12. Knoweth not his time.**] He knows not the hour of his destruction, when he shall be suddenly snared and taken by death. This solemn crisis in man's destiny is called in Scripture the "day" (Job xviii. 20), the "hour" (Mark xiv. 41). **As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare.** The net, trap, and snare are symbols of those divine judgments which suddenly overtake men (Ez. xii. 13, xxxii. 3; Prov. vii. 23; Luke xxi. 35). **13. This wisdom.**] The special instance of the power of wisdom related in the next verse. **14. Few men within it.**] Not a city with a scanty population, but one possessing only a few fitting men capable of defending it. **18. One sinner destroyeth much good.**] One who is gifted with great physical energy, but destitute of wisdom. The coarsest qualities—the fierce attributes of the wild beast—are sufficient for the work of destruction.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—6.

The Seeming Imperfection of God's Moral Government.

By imperfection, as applied to God's Moral Government, we may understand either that it has some fault or fatal defect; or else that it lacks completeness, and is still but rudimentary. It is only in this latter sense that the system of God's dealings with men can be charged with imperfection. This view, however, is not insisted upon here. The writer sets aside, for the moment, the future world. Viewed merely from this life, the action of Providence over human affairs seems to be defective. How does such an idea arise? I. It is suggested by the fact that the Righteous and the Wicked are Subjected to an Equal Fate. (Verses 2, 3.) 1. *In regard to the events and experiences of life.* Some appear to be the favourites of fortune. But in this distribution of the world's goods we fail to discern, in every case, the rewards of virtue. The richest gifts the world can afford often fall to the lot of the most unworthy. The righteous are sometimes prosperous, but so are the wicked. The pure and holy share the same earthly lot with the defiled. The despisers of religion have quite as good a portion in this life as those who revere God's holy law. The profane are not frowned upon by Providence: those who reverence God are not outwardly distinguished by any special regard. Take the whole variety of human experience—joys and sorrows, prosperity and adversity, success, disappointment, and failure, health and sickness—they come alike to all. The righteous are not distinguished by any special fate. It would seem as if the fortunes of men were assigned to them by a blind chance, or by some reckless Power. 2. *In regard to the expectation from life.* No man can have any ground to expect that his portion in the time that remains to him will compensate for the evils of the past. Time brings no power to adjust the unequal distribution of good and evil. "No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them." No man can assure himself of a prosperous future on the ground of his moral excellence. He does not know in advance whether God will grant him love or hatred; whether his life will be cheered by the one, or vexed and tormented by the other. 3. *In regard to the necessity of death.* Righteousness does not deliver from death. The quickening of the soul by the infusion of spiritual life does not preserve the body from decay, or purchase exemption from the dishonour of the grave. "The body is dead because of sin" is a stern decree which even the closest union with Christ cannot set aside. There are times when the shadow of this terrible necessity darkens and troubles lives in which immortal hope is strong. The wisest and purest must pay the debt of nature alike with the ungodly and the fool. Death to our human eye, uninformed by a better light, seems to level all moral distinctions and to destroy the hope of righteous reward. II. This has a Morally Injurious Effect upon Some. (Verse 3.) The apparent disregard of Providence to moral distinctions of character causes some to rush upon courses of evil. This may arise, 1. *From the loss of faith in God's rectitude.* Those who stumble against appearances in the moral world easily resign themselves to the belief, either that God is altogether absent from this scene of man, or quite indifferent to the conduct of His creatures. A man may brood over the moral difficulties of our present state until God vanishes from his view. Even where the truth of God's existence cannot be wholly erased from the mind, the consciousness of his rectitude is so faintly marked that men indulge in sin without restraint. Goodness can stand any test so long as it retains the conviction that "the Judge of all the earth will do right." When this conviction is gone, what is there left to make virtue worth a sacrifice? 2. *From the weakening of the motives of moral conduct.* There are some who admit

a Providence, and that there is a tendency discoverable in the present state of things towards perfection. This belief, however, is so feeble that it has scarcely any perceptible influence upon the conduct. Practically, they are without faith in God. They hold no belief that is effective as a restraint in the ways of wickedness. The strange folly of their lives is so manifest that it may be charged with madness. The end of this scene is as melancholy as its course was sad and unprofitable. "After that, they go to the dead." III. In spite of this Imperfection, Men prefer the Present Life to the seeming Extinction of Existence in the Grave. (Verses 4, 5, 6.) The dead appear to be at rest. In poetic moods, men may long for the quiet of the grave. But in the calm deliberation of thought they shrink from the idea of oblivion rushing upon their souls. They prefer life with all its disadvantages to that vague uncertainty which belongs to the state of the dead. 1. *Life always affords room for hope.* (Verse 4.) While life remains, men may always look for a better state of things. They derive some satisfaction from resigning the rectification of their fortunes into the hands of time. The sick man hopes for recovery, though hard against the warrant of appearances, and stays himself upon that hope until the end. Mankind have felt that the light of life, even when but glimmering in the socket, lends a ray to hope. This has passed into a proverb. The meanest thing that lives is better than the noblest when dead. The poorest and most forlorn living man has no cause to envy the most wealthy and renowned when he is laid in the grave. 2. *The present life has the advantage of certainty.* That which is remote from us in space or future time makes but a languid impression. We may contemplate the darkness that rests upon the state of man beyond the grave until the mind is overshadowed with gloom and belief dies. Even the Royal Preacher, for the moment, resigns himself to the dreariest view of the destiny of man. Life has many advantages. (1.) *There is the fact of consciousness.* "The living know that they shall die." This is but a melancholy knowledge, yet the consciousness of possessing it yields some satisfaction. Man shrinks from the very idea of his thought and feeling being quenched in eternal midnight. To all outward appearance, the dead are for ever still—stripped of all that distinguishes and adorns life. They know nothing. The consciousness of knowing the facts of life, though some of them are painful, we cherish as a pure enjoyment; and the thought of letting it go disturbs us. While we are alive, it is possible to feel and know that we are dealt with by some Superior Power; but the dead appear to have completely done with a retributive Providence. (2.) *There is the fact of possessing a recognised place among the living.* While we are numbered with the inhabitants of this world we have our circle of influence, be it great or small. The most insignificant must occupy some place in the thoughts and feelings of others, and act, and be acted upon, in turns. But the presence of the dead is removed from us, they soon cease to affect us, and at length slip entirely from the remembrance of the living. (3.) *There is the conscious play of the passions and emotions.* (Verse 6.) Love, hatred, and envy, with the mixture of joy and pain they involve, afford evidence of conscious life. Whether for good or baneful influence, they minister to the luxury of feeling. But, to all appearance, no emotion heaves the bosom of the dead. They seem powerless to awaken any response to love, they are conscious of no affront to stir the rage of hatred, or of rivalry to kindle the fires of envy. They are deaf alike to the voice of censure and of fame.

> "Can honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
> Or flattery soothe the dull cold ear of death!"

IV. This Imperfection should not be an Insurmountable Obstacle to Faith. (Verse 1.) It may be admitted that, in the scheme of Providence, there is much to try our faith. There are times in the lives of most believers when the darkest

doubts take possession of the soul. Witness John the Baptist in prison, who after the clearest evidence of the Messiah's claims, was yet disturbed by doubt, and sent two of his disciples for fresh and surer evidence. (Matt. xi. 2—6.) Still, though the darkness that lies over the future, and the oppression of life's mystery, try faith severely, yet God granted to men, even in times of imperfect revelation, firm supports for faith to lean upon. "*The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hands of God.*" Therefore they can afford calmly to wait. He will not disappoint their hope, nor quench in the long silence of the grave their yearnings for eternal life. The strong faith that we are in the hands of God can clear the barriers of the tomb, and find beyond them a sure place whereon to rest for ever. We have our truest refuge in the character of God. If we cherish the belief in His goodness; no difficulties, no evils, nor even the shadow of death, can affright us.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. The hand of God is not the symbol of mere power, but of power subdued and controlled by infinite wisdom and goodness. It is a hand that will gather the righteous to the bosom of their Father. When God holds us by His right hand, we may well cherish the blessed confidence that he will "afterwards receive us to glory." (Ps. lxxiii. 24.)

Not only the works of the righteous, but themselves, are in the hands of God. Much of their work may perish, as being valueless and not able to endure the final test, but they themselves shall abide for ever.

The solemn committal of the spirit into the hands of God is the last pious duty alive.

The fact that we are in the hands of God, as controlled by the Supreme Power, is one thing, but the felt conviction of it is another. When we awake to the consciousness that we have a living Director, we can pass through the most troubled darkness without fear.

Though His Providence does present a mystery to our limited faculties, yet He is not forgetful of those who fear Him. They and their works are neither unknown, nor unregarded: and He will one day make it fully manifest that His whole procedure has perfectly accorded with His character [*Wardlaw*].

They are kept safe in the hand of God; and that hand which now keepeth them, will at last reach forth a glorious reward unto them [*Jermin*].

The highest moral excellence cannot assure its possessor of human regard and love. Even the flower of humanity was constrained to say, "They hated me without a cause."

Verse 2. The true moral worth of men must not be estimated by the light of their outward fate.

Righteousness can deliver no one from the necessity of enduring the sad variety of human experience.

This life is not the last act in the great drama of human history. It is not here and now that men are receiving the due reward of their deeds. After that curtain shall have fallen that is destined to cover up and close the latest of the shifting scenes of time, it will rise once more to bring into view a vaster, grander, and more awful stage than time ever displayed [*Buchanan*].

Verse 3. Those stern outward conditions in which all men are bound, irrespective of character, furnish a proof of some present disorder, and raise in pious souls the expectation of Divine interference to restore to goodness true place and reward.

A wise man does not hesitate to recognise obvious evils. He feels the oppression of life's strange mystery, as the same has been felt by such saints as Job and Asaph. He is not driven

to melancholy and despair, for he is sustained by a better hope. He is not driven to mad rebellion, for he fears God.

The moral mystery of our present life is a trial which God has appointed for man. If we endure it wisely and well, He rewards our faith with plentiful consolation, giving us peace in the depths of our soul. If we fail herein, we are either driven to despair or to the wildest courses of sin.

The heart distributes the power of sin within us, by which it corrupts the life and fills the world with evils.

The moral madness of sinners shows itself in foolish and impossible thoughts of God and His ways, and in foolish contrivances for their own deliverance.

Every act of sin, being an act of rebellion against the infinite God, is an act of madness; of infatuated, and impotent, and self-destroying frenzy. All worldliness of spirit, being a preference in affection and pursuit of temporal to eternal things, is madness; far beyond the derangement of the maniac who throws away gold for stones, and prefers straw to pearls and jewels [*Wardlaw*].

Repining against God and his Providence, because they cannot longer enjoy their sinful pleasures, they carry their sins with them to the very gates of death [*Nisbet*].

Verse 4. While life remains, for the sinner there is the hope of amendment and restoration—for the exiles of fortunes, the hope of returning. To living man there is no gloom so oppressive but that some ray of hope may struggle through.

Life suggests the idea of liberty, of some large space to move and work in. While it is continued, the range of possibilities for us is wide. We think of death as putting an arrest upon our liberty—in some sense a prison for man.

The meanest living man possesses a superiority over the mightiest dead, in having life itself, and power, and consciousness, and feeling, and enjoyment; which with regard to the dead, viewed in their relation to this world, are all at an end; and equally at an end, whatever their power and eminence while they lived [*Wardlaw*].

The superior value and importance of life may be regarded either as the justification of a course of self-indulgence and pleasurable sin, or as a motive for diligence in that work which can only be done in this world. There is a mean and also a noble view of man's existence; and as we take one or the other, so the significance of this proverb may be determined.

Verse 5. The consciousness of existence is a necessary truth—the surest and most intimate knowledge we possess. This one fact gives importance and value to all others.

Existence, though it implies the knowledge of the saddest facts, is yet a positive good when compared with the total loss of conscious being.

To the eye of sense the dead seem bereft of all thought, feeling, and motion. There are appearances enough —for those who are under the tyranny of them—to justify the darkest scepticism and boldest defiance of future retribution.

As far as the opportunities, duties, and experiences of this life are concerned, the dead are completely severed from us. Even the poetical existence which memory gives them at length fades away.

Limited as is the view here given of the change death makes in the condition of those who have lived and died without God—for it is of them, as the context plainly implies, that Solomon is speaking—it is sufficiently humbling and awful. From the moment they die, their connection with this world is at an end. This world was their all, and they have lost it. They know nothing of it now. Its rewards cannot reach them in the grave. Their very name and memory soon pass away out of the world altogether [*Buchanan*].

Verse 6. They are utterly impotent; they have no power whatever remaining, either to profit or to hurt, and are

neither courted for the one, nor feared for the other. Their power to benefit and to injure is alike gone. The objects of their love can derive from it no advantage, nor can the victims of their hatred and envy sustain from them any damage. While they lived, their favour might be courted, and its effects desired; their displeasure deprecated, their hatred and envy dreaded, and the consequences of them anxiously shunned. But their mere names have no charm, either of blessing or of curse. The ashes of the grave can do neither evil nor good. . . . Their portion of enjoyment is gone for ever. Death is not a temporary absence, but an eternal adieu [*Wardlaw*].

How little have we to fear from the rage of human passions which, so far as they can affect us, are totally extinguished in the grave.

Man is destined to a continuity of existence, but in his progress through it, as one door is opened before him, another closes behind. Whatever awaits man in the future world, the severance from this world is most complete.

These gloomy views of the state of the dead are modified by the later Revelation—their sadness relieved by Christian hope; yet death, in some sense, does reign over all until the resurrection. When "this mortal puts on immortality," only then is the victory of man over the grave complete.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—10.

THE UNSATISFACTORY CONDITIONS OF THE PRESENT LIFE IN THEIR BEARING UPON DUTY.

The Preacher had shown that the ways of God to man are full of dark mystery. This has been a terrible oppression to many—to some even a fatal one. We must admit that man's present condition is unsatisfactory; for it is rudimentary. It is on the way to perfection. The dark enigma of life, however, should not be a fatal obstacle to duty. Of the unsatisfactory conditions of the present life, we affirm—I. They do not Forbid a Joyful Acceptance and Use of the Blessings of Providence. (Verses 7, 8, 9.) The habit of dwelling exclusively upon the dark side of things is hurtful to the soul. We are either driven to melancholy and despair, or else to the mad pursuit of pleasure by which we seek to drown all anxiety and care. There is a safe middle way between these two extremes, by which we avoid gloom and despair, on the one hand, and a reckless pursuit of pleasure, on the other hand. We should thankfully accept the blessings of Providence, and use them with sobriety. The consciousness that God "accepteth" our "works" should be at once the impulse and the director of our joy (Verse 7). The constant reference to God, and the intention of pleasing Him, will sanctify all life. There are three sources of enjoyment referred to here, which we may soberly and thankfully use. 1. *The satisfaction of the appetites.* (Verse 7.) Our physical wants are a fact of our nature which we must accept. They crave for satisfaction. These natural endowments, as they arise from the appointment of the Creator, are not sinful in themselves. They only become the occasion of sin by unlawful indulgence. The bounty of the Great Giver has furnished means for the satisfaction of our common wants, even ministering to the most delicate perceptions of taste and gladdening the heart of man. 2. *The taste for outward beauty.* (Verse 8.) There are outward forms, the contemplation of which gives an exquisite and refined pleasure. Thus the ornaments of dress minister to the instinct of beauty and harmony. The Creator, in His works, has not only studied utility, but has even prepared those graces and ornaments which wait upon our perception of elegance. He has placed this instinct in the human breast. We may indulge it if we only do so with moderation, remembering that outward beauty has no infinite capacity to please. It is a joy which is bounded, and God alone is the soul's pure and permanent

delight. 3. *Domestic joys.* (Verse 9.) The various relations of life, whether we are born to their possession, or enter them by choice, minister to our social enjoyments. They tend to abate the natural selfishness of the human heart and to multiply and exalt our pleasures. These are the gifts of God—they are our "portion" here. They serve for awhile to lift our minds above the overwhelming sense of the vanity of life. We can use such joys if we remember that they too are fleeting, and that the only sure and abiding portion for the soul is God. "The fashion"—the outward form, scheme, or arrangement—"of this world passeth away." (1 Cor. vii. 31.) II. They do not Forbid proper Zeal and Diligence in the Work of Life. (Verse 10.) We may dwell upon the dark things of life until we are driven to despair, and despair paralyses effort. Weak hands and feeble knees accompany melancholy. Whatever be the tendencies and issues of things—the ultimate solution of this mystery—we have great practical duties to perform. 1. *We should accept the task and duty lying nearest to us.* It is in vain to sit still and wait for some congenial task to fall in our way. There are duties enough lying to our hand. No man has need to be idle for lack of a task. 2. *We should be earnest in our work.* The most exalted natures are distinguished by the highest activity—*God*, who works in and through all—*the angels*, who are quick and strong to do His will. Throughout the whole course of nature we observe unwearied activity. Creation preaches to us, saying, be earnest. The illustrious names of history who have won a distinction that will never die exhort us to industry. Such is the price we have to pay for all possessions that are of true and abiding worth. 3. *We have a strong motive for such earnestness.* Whatever may lie before us in the future, there are certain kinds of work which can only be done in this world. While the work is before us and our faculty is fresh, all is fluent to our hands; but when our life's day is ended, all becomes rigid—fixed in the solemn stillness of eternity! There are forms of work and of knowledge which are only possible here. If we disregard them, there will be no chance afforded us to repair the omission. Even Christ himself, during his earthly sojourn, came under this law. There was a work which even He could do only in this world. (John ix. 4.) He felt that in His mortal day His allotted task must be accomplished. The grave is the dark terminus of our earthly work. III. They do not Destroy our Hope of Reward. From the appearances of this life we may draw the hasty conclusion that there is no reward for goodness hereafter, no vindication of suffering innocence. It seems as if this troubled drama of human history must repeat itself endlessly throughout the ages. But we have to reflect, 1. *That we stand in a present relation to God.* If we are good in His sight, He accepts our works now. He receives them as the homage of our gratitude, and pieces out our imperfections with His goodness. We may well hope that that goodness has provided for us the larger gift of immortality. God will not permit us to know Him and work for Him through the brief space of life, and then blot us out of existence for ever. 2. *We have reason to hope that we shall stand in a future relation to Him.* If we can say with the Psalmist, "O God, Thou art my God" (Psa. lxiii. 1), we may well hope that He shall be our portion for ever, that He shall redeem us from the power of the grave. The majesty of God requires that He shall make His servants rich, not only by the bestowal of gifts by which they serve Him, but also in the heritage of eternal life, so that they may serve Him for ever. Therefore, though the way be dark, we can have light enough for duty; and unfading hope to assure us that there is for us a higher service in other worlds.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 7. The mystery of God's moral Government should not render our sight insensible to the impressions of His goodness, the proofs of which are full and manifest.

The Almighty Maker of all things

intended that the beauty of His works should make an appeal to mind and heart. In like manner, He intends that the gifts of His hand should awaken in us the emotions of gratitude and joy.

When God accepts our works, the commonest actions of our life become sanctified.

Though faith be sorely tried by appearances, yet God is on the side of the righteous, giving them tokens of acceptance and reserving greater things for them.

We must learn to live before we can live rightly and well. With us, "that which is natural" forces itself upon us as our first care. Afterwards that which is spiritual. Wherefore those ordinary gifts of Providence by which we are constantly delivered from death deserve the instant tribute of our praise and joy.

Moses putting his hand into his bosom took it out leprous, putting it again into his bosom, he took it out clean. The hand is the instrument of working, and the works of man are sometimes leprous and unsound, sometimes healthy and good. If they proceed from a sincere and honest heart, which God approveth, then they are sound and healthy; but if they come from a corrupt heart, and be done for the pleasing of men, then they are leprous and unsound. Now it is a healthy and sound body that is fittest for mirth and freest in mirth, it is a healthy and sound body that eateth and drinketh most cheerfully. Wherefore seeing where God accepteth thy works, there is health and soundness, let there also be freeness of joy and mirth [*Jermin*].

Verse 8. Cheerfulness should be the soul's habit, and joy the prevailing expression of the soul's countenance.

God gives His people the oil of joy to assuage their grief, and fits them for the feast of His pleasures by the garments of praise.

The notion of *pleasure* seems invariably associated with the practice; and it was aptly indicated by the richness and freshness, and, in many cases, by the aromatic fragrance, of the balsamic unguents. "Let thy head lack no ointment" is equivalent to—Rejoice in the bounty and loving-kindness of the Lord; "let not thy heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." And the expression "let thy garments be *always* white" is of the same account with the Apostolic exhortation, "Rejoice evermore!" Take the enjoyment of whatever the hand of a kind Providence bestows, with a grateful and cheerful spirit; not with selfishness or extravagance, or thoughtless mirth; but with benevolence and sobriety, and with that true joy which is independent of the possessions of time, which, coming from above, infuses into the things of earth a relish of heaven, and would continue to be the inmate of the pious soul, though they were all removed [*Wardlaw*].

Christ was anointed with the oil of joy, although he lived under the shadow of a great calamity. All noble souls have a deep and intimate joy which no disasters can dislodge.

Verse 9. The disciples of wisdom affect no refinement beyond the ordinances of God.

We should joyfully use those solaces which God's Providence has provided for us as a peaceful retreat from the tumultuous scenes of life.

"Here love his golden shafts employs, here lights
His constant lamp, and waves his purple wings—
Here reigns and revels" [*Paradise Lost*].

The moral character of nations is determined by the purity and integrity of domestic life. The home is the support, the forerunner, the very material of the State and Church. The righteous man, by beautifying and sanctifying home, is the real safety and hope of his country.

We should look upon the joys of domestic life as the earthly reward of our labour, our measured portion of happiness here, and the gift of God.

The sense of time fast speeding on to eternity hangs over the most endearing

scenes of life, and at times touches thoughtful minds with overwhelming emotion.

By the repetition of the last words we are expressly taught that, in the midst of the vanity and travail with which human existence is burdened, we are pressingly summoned not to seal up the sources of enjoyment which still remain open to us [*Hengstenberg*].

The consideration of the vanity and shortness of their life, and of the miseries incident to it, though it should not provoke them to excess of sensual delights, yet it should incite them to a more cheerful use of these comforts, that, seeing their time is short, they may have the more strength and encouragement to serve the Lord cheerfully. For while Solomon is pressing upon men a cheerful and free use of outward comforts, he minds them twice of the vanity of their life, which, in the midst of these things, they are ready to forget, and makes the same a reason pressing the cheerful use of their allowance [*Nisbet*].

Verse 10. The melancholy and gloom which deep thought awakens is dissipated by the active exertion of our powers in duty.

Whatever is dark and mysterious in man's present state, his work, and the obligation to perform it, are quite clear and evident. It is better to spend his energy upon what is certain than to torment himself with the pain of speculation.

That the opportunity is short is a motive for diligent exertion in our work, but not the strongest motive; which the notion of our state hereafter, depending upon our work here, alone supplies. Therefore this exhortation requires, though it does not formally state, the doctrine of a future life.

Death is truly an unclothing of man, who, though his being is continuous, must put aside what he cannot resume again. There are duties to be performed, talents and powers to be used, which are peculiar to the present state; they must altogether be put off with our mortal life.

Though sustained by immortal hope, it is salutary to reflect upon the physical side of death, and learn from thence diligence in the duty of the moment, or even console ourselves by the melancholy prospect of its long repose. Whatever the state of the dead may be, it is certain that it is night to us, as far as some kinds of work and modes of knowledge are concerned.

Nothing that has been neglected here can be attended to there. If we fail to perform a duty in this life, there will be no opportunity of performing it in the place of the dead. If we have errors to confess, or wrongs to repair—if we have any bad influence to undo, or any good influence to employ—if we have any evil habits to unlearn, or any gracious tendencies to cultivate, now is the time [*Buchanan*].

Man's characteristic is restlessness; restlessness foretells his immortality; and a sluggard by his apathy seems to destroy the mark, and silence the prophecy. But if confined to other things, indolence may not be absolutely fatal; the indolent man may have wealth which secures him against want; and by the occasional exercise of rare talents he may, in spite of habitual sluggishness, even attain to some measure of distinction. But an indolent Christian—it is a sort of contradiction—Christianity is industry spiritualised [*Melvill*].

Diligence in our earthly and heavenly callings is the surest way through mystery and darkness up to God.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11—12.

THE HIGHER WILL IN HUMAN THINGS.

I. That Will is Supreme over Human Actions. (Verse 11.) The will of man is the force that apparently directs and controls his earthly history. It seems to make him an independent being. He boasts of his freedom, exerts himself to

satisfy his ambition, or to minister to his pleasures. Yet man is impotent. There is a Higher Will which through all the changes of human history is being accomplished. 1. *There is a Divine disposition of human things altogether beyond our control.* "Time and chance happeneth to them all." There are times and seasons in our lives. We have no power to control their order or duration. Each man too has his "chance" which "happeneth" to him. Chance is not used here as opposed to Providence, as if man were the sport of some uncertain and irresponsible dominion, but it is opposed to human effort, whose results are shaped by a Higher Power than the will and energy of man. We spend our little strength and faculty in devising for ourselves; but the ultimate result of our actions, their permanent shape, is devised and finished by the Divine power. Thus God is over all, even in regard to the production and result of those actions in which we consider ourselves most free. 2. *Human efforts often fail though ever so fittingly contrived.* (Verse 11.) "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, &c." Fortune sometimes gives denial to our expectation founded upon the likelihood or natural tendency of things. It must be admitted that superior powers of running are of prime importance to a racer, and tend to ensure his success; that numbers and strength give a superior advantage in battle; that the gifts of wisdom, understanding, and skill, raise a man to superior eminence, enlarge his authority and influence, and furnish him with the means of securing distinction and competence. But these several gifts and faculties are so complicated with disturbing elements, over which men have no control, that they often fail of success. The most agile racer, and surest of the victor's crown, may stumble, or be seized by bodily faintness, and thus fail of his prize. An army superior in discipline and numbers may be defeated. Some difficulty of climate or of position, or the caprices of some strange accidents, may turn the fortunes of war. How often it has happened that disease has proved more destructive than the sword, and that victories which national vanity has ascribed to courage and skill, were chiefly owing to the accidental advantage of health. The wise man ought to attain to that distinction to which his talents entitle him, but that many such have altogether failed, the sad examples of history show. The wise man may have some unfortunate disposition of mind or of temper that may ruin his prospect of success. Great skill and understanding may be so combined with follies and absurdities that their possessor may fail to secure the proper rewards of them. Adverse circumstances may hinder him from taking his true place, or enjoying his proper reward. He may be hindered from rising by social surroundings, and thus consigned to neglect. Thus events do not always happen according to the natural tendencies of human effort and skill. Let a man have ever so great advantage, yet as to the future he is literally sure of nothing. There are qualities *likely* to secure success, but whether they will do so in any given case, we cannot know. The issues of all human thoughts and labours are with God, who accomplishes His will, not only in the obedient and fluent elements of the physical universe, but also in the troubled and refractory elements of the moral world. **II. That Will is Supreme over Human Life.** We have seen that the dominion of God is supreme over all that life contains. The same also is true of the bounds of life itself. 1. *The time of each man's death is hidden from him.* (Verse 12.) No man knows at what time death will overtake him. The probability that out of a given number of men, now alive, a certain number will die within a fixed period of years, may be calculated. But no refinement of analysis can show whether any given individual will be dead at a stated time. Men may have some vague and melancholy fancy that they will die at a certain time of life, but the fact very rarely justifies the presentiment. The mariner can calculate his distance from the desired haven, as he nears it from day to day, but no man can compute his distance from the shores of eternity. As ignorant as the fishes are of the net, or as the birds are of the snare, so

are men of the time of their capture and destruction by the great enemy. 2. *The manner of each man's death is hidden from him.* There are many ways to death, but each man is ignorant by which of these he shall go down to the silent house of darkness. It may be suddenly, by some unforeseen accident, or delayed through the slow and painful stages of a wasting sickness. He may die at home, or among strangers in a strange land. He may die upon the great highway of the waters, and sink into the vast sepulchre of the sea. The proverb says, "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird" (Prov. i. 17). The bird is ignorant of the design of such a contrivance; so man, though he may see the snares of death preparing, knows not that they are laid with fatal intent for him. Thus, while there is room left for our actions and our skill to work out their issues, our sovereignty over them is limited. They take themselves at length out of our dominion, and become fashioned to the dictates of a higher will.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 11. The best and most skilfully directed efforts may fail to secure the result aimed at, because they may come into collision with events quite beyond our control.

The fortune of war may be determined by a slight circumstance, altogether unknown and unsuspected, and so the stream of events for a nation may suddenly take a new course. Human history is but a resultant of many forces, of which the power and skill of man is but a part. Hence through the complex system of human life, Providence works out those designs which are above and beyond man.

"Time and chance" are necessary in order to ensure success, even for the most skilful and wise. There must be a suitable season, and a favourable concurrence of circumstances, or else the time will be out of joint and nothing will work.

Superior skill and understanding are naturally fitted to secure the best results of success and prosperity. But who can ensure his health, and yet how much depends upon this?

Chance is a term denoting ignorance, not on God's part, but on ours. It has been happily defined, although by a poet, yet without a poet's fiction,—"direction which we cannot see." The blind Goddess of Fortune is but the creation of a foolish and ungodly fancy. Without our Heavenly Father, "a sparrow falleth not to the ground" [*Wardlaw*].

The wise man by some unfortunate combination of circumstances may be reduced to want. The man of understanding—the man, for example, most conversant with both the materials and the principles of commerce—may never come to wealth. Unforeseen events may derange his plans, and disappoint his calculations. Unpropitious seasons may blight the produce of his fields. Storms may sink his ships in the deep. His confidence may be betrayed and his property wasted by those in whose hands he has placed it. And while this man of large and cultured intellect may come to old age in comparative poverty, some ignorant and illiterate bore, who started in life alongside of him, may have swelled into a millionaire [*Buchanan*].

The world worships success, which is, after all, an insufficient and uncertain measure of real worth. Wisdom, and things that accompany it are still an invaluable possession, though they seem to fail.

That there is some kind of Power which baffles the most aptly contrived designs of man must be admitted. It may be regarded as blind and unintelligent, as arbitrary Will, or as Infinite Wisdom working towards righteous ends, though in strange and mysterious ways; each of which views may com-

mend itself according to our religious insight. To the Christian, the highest Power in human affairs is the Divine Mercy (Rom. ix. 16).

Verse 12. We know not the time of those disasters which overturn our schemes and disappoint our hopes; nor do we know the time of that great disaster which shall deprive us of all!

How vain the boast of wealth, or pomp of power—of all that lies outside of us—seeing they are held on the uncertain tenure of life!

The preparations for accomplishing his capture and destruction lie before a man, and he knows it not. Our ignorance of the caprices of disaster and doom bring us into companionship with the lowliest forms of life.

Man's ignorance of the time of his death serves, 1. To place him helplessly in the hands of Providence. Rebellion is vain, and nothing remains for him but loving submission or desperate resignation. 2. To promote the good of society. The knowledge of the hour when life's day closes would paralyse effort. 3. To strengthen the motives for godliness. The time is uncertain, and therefore instant provision should be made for the soul. More exalted and enduring things should engage our affections.

He that by a constant holiness secures the present, and makes it useful to his noblest purposes, turns his condition into his best advantage by making his unavoidable fate become his necessary religion [*Jeremy Taylor*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—18.

The World's Benefactors.

The Royal Preacher turns to consider a strange anomaly that too often happens in a thoughtless and ungrateful generation. Men who have been the true workers and deliverers of their time have often been despised and forgotten. The world is ignorant, or guilty of neglect, of its true benefactors. How they work, and with what success, is considered here. I. Their Instrument. Wisdom is the instrument by which they worked. It was a "wise man" who "delivered the city." (Verse 15.) Their words heard in quiet among the contemplative few have proved stronger than the edicts of the most potent rulers, yea even stronger than the power of warlike arms. (Verses 17, 18.) They have conferred real and permanent benefits upon their fellow men. For such a purpose, we observe, 1. *That wisdom is the most fitting instrument.* Man, with many natural disadvantages when compared with the lower forms of life beneath him, still holds his place in nature as the crown and head of all things by his superior knowledge. By means of wisdom, that knowledge is made to act in the direction of the greatest advantage. We may say that this instrument has a *natural fitness* for performing the truest and most lasting work. The highest natures use it, for "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth, by understanding hath He established the heavens." (Prov. iii. 19.) All work produced by other means, however loud and long the triumph, must end in confusion and overthrow. However big and imposing the work of fools, they shall at length be buried in the heaps they raise. Wisdom as an instrument may also be said to have a *moral fitness.* It tends to injure no one; its pure and just conquests are not stained by crime, and ravage, and slaughter. The tears of the widow and the orphan do not trouble its quiet enjoyment of victory. All true wisdom—whether strictly in the sphere of religion or outside of it—is from above; and coming down to earth pure from its native heaven, bears on the front of it the gifts of peace. 2. *That it is the most potent instrument.* "Wisdom is better than strength—better than weapons of war." (Verses 16, 18.) All work that is truly great and abiding commences in wise thought. The scheme of it is laid

in silence in the utmost recesses of the mind until it assumes shape and substance in the palpable and accomplished fact. The material creation which is the standing illustration of the Divine power is but the Divine thought manifested. Brute force has narrow limits, moving with a constrained motion; but the power of wisdom is large, plentiful in resources, and free. Wisdom is the true director of all forces, without which they are wild, irregular, and destructive. It is the force which has urged humanity on in the upward path of high civilization, refinement, and goodness. II. The Manner of their Working. In her method and manner of working, there is a style and habit appropriate to wisdom. She wields a quiet power, shunning all noise and loud display. "The words of wise men are heard in quiet." This quality for quietness and sobriety is one of the chief characteristics of the deliverances and of the works of wisdom. All who would learn from her and receive her gifts must possess this quality. 1. *Quietness promotes those conditions of mind most favourable to the reception of wisdom.* All who enter her school must leave behind them the noise and tumult of petty ambition, boisterous self-assertion, and pride. Fools must either put away these things, or quit her courts. The still small voice of wisdom is only heard amidst the quietness of contemplation. We must enter this kingdom as a little child, with the qualities of teachableness and humility, putting away all positiveness and pride, which are ever noisy and demonstrative. 2. *All the conquests of wisdom have been quietly won.* Other victories have been prompted by ambition and attained by violence. The victories of wisdom, on the other hand, have been accomplished in those clear and lofty heights of contemplation far above the tumult and strife of human passion. Wisdom, with truth for her possession and substance, has been content to wait till the temporary advantages of error have passed away, and then she has quietly gathered in her spoils. 3. *Quietness is the attribute of the greatest natures.* The great thinkers of the world who have opened up for us new regions of truth, how quietly and silently they worked! We feel their power still across the ages of time. They seem to "rule our spirits from their urns." The victories of religion over superstition and unbelief have been won by the steady witnessing to the truth, and the patience of suffering. He who came to conquer all hearts, and to lay the foundations of an everlasting kingdom, was distinguished by his quiet manner of working and freedom from desire of display. He did not "strive nor cry," nor was "His voice heard in the streets." This quiet demeanour of wisdom is, in Verse 17, shown in contrast with the boisterous manner in which folly is wont to display itself. "The ruler among fools" soon becomes the victim of the virulent contagion of folly, and utters injudicious commands with fierce and noisy circumstance. III. Their Fate. (Verses 15, 16.) There are some exceptions, but the example here related is a description of the fate of many wise and good men. 1. *They are sometimes noticed and obeyed under the pressure of circumstances.* In some dangerous crisis or great calamity, the wise man may rise to importance and regard. There are junctures of events in which the most careless and unreflecting men must turn to such for deliverance. When the enemy is at the gates, and the valour of mighty heroes is unavailing, he who can devise some wise project which saves the city, gains that approbation and fame so readily yielded to evident success. There are times when the wise man's wisdom must be valued, even by the most thoughtless, as a precious commodity. 2. *They are sometimes the victims of contumely and neglect.* When the calamity is overpast, society soon learns to forget those who have served it in the crisis of danger. This fault of ingratitude appears in almost every little social circle, and has a constant illustration in the history of every nation and age. The world too willingly lets the names die of those who have blest it most. Those are not always the best and truest workers whose names stand in the front of history. It will be found that the world's most real benefactors are

those who took the most subordinate and retired part. Their work is undying in its effects, but their names have perished from all remembrance but that of God. Many a truly wise and great man has lived to be forgotten and despised. This is a base ingratitude, for it deprives such of their earthly reward. The barriers of wealth and social standing have often served to keep wise men from rising into just regard and fame. This wise man delivered the city; but he was poor, and *that* was quite sufficient to ensure his being despised. 3. *Their work is often ruined.* The essential good of their work cannot be destroyed, for it is an imperishable seed, which once having taken hold upon the world, leaves it not. But some of the immediate results of their work—fruits of patient toil and endurance—may be destroyed, which exploit only needs the natural endowments of the most thoughtless and wicked fool. (Verse 18.) Physical strength—the power of social station—the boisterous impudence of ignorant and foolish men—may prevail over the wise and ruin his work. It requires but little talent to destroy, for it is within the province of any lusty fool to lay in ruins the labour and skill of years, or to obstruct the progress of some good and great work. *From this subject we learn both the power and the vanity of wisdom.* The *power*, in that it is superior to strength, to numbers, to the voice of mere authority, or to the influence of social rank. It is the prime element in the world's progress—the means of its regeneration. The *vanity*, in that it often fails, or at best has but a partial victory, through the stubborn and ignorant opposition of men.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 13. It had made a strong impression on his mind. The testimony which it bore to the value and efficacy of wisdom appeared to him to be most remarkable. On one side there was a king, backed by a powerful army, and having at his command, for the capture and destruction of the feebly-garrisoned city he had come to assail, all the arts and appliances of war. On the other side was a solitary individual, of no note or name, without wealth or station, or social influence, having no other strength than that which was derived from his own personal worth, and no other resources than those of a God-fearing, sagacious, and thoughtful spirit [*Buchanan*].

Wisdom without the advantages of wealth or station, yet securing regard and attention to itself, is so rare a spectacle, that the wise themselves, at the sight of it, may well stand amazed. In a perfect state of society, such a triumph would be too common to be wonderful.

Verse 14. There is a baseness in oppression which allows no rights to the defenceless and the weak.

The oppressed have often on their side an unknown and unsuspected power which avails for deliverance, and by which the most confident ambition is defeated.

The "little city" of the Church of God has often been besieged, and the enemy has prepared to celebrate the victory over an extinguished Faith. But the tower of God has ever had brave defenders, strong in wisdom and in the might of goodness.

Verse 15. A sudden calamity may serve to redeem the wise from neglect.

When the strong fail to deliver, and rank and authority are of no avail, wise men must be sought for. Such alone are the true defence of states.

That is a foolish and ignoble pride which refuses to acknowledge worth because it is not encrusted by wealth. Yet such is the way of the world,—"Slow rises worth by poverty depressed."

What was it that rescued the nations of the ancient world from the universal heathenism in which they were sunk; from the gross superstitions and multiplied abominations of an all-

prevailing idolatry? Not the poetry and literature, not the arts and philosophy, of Greece and Rome, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those humble peasants and fishermen, who issued from the upper chamber of some obscure street of Jerusalem, were the poor wise men who delivered the cities of the ancient world [*Buchanan*].

The pressure of necessity, or the claims of selfishness, may force admiration for the poor man's wisdom, but such admiration expires before it has time to ripen into gratitude, or attain to the sturdy strength of a principle.

How hard is the condition of poverty, when social prejudice can overwhelm a man whose wisdom it has been compelled to own!

Verse 16. The triumphs of wisdom over brute force and the terrible powers of nature, all of which it subdues under the sovereignty of man, are among its first fruits. It has also a surpassing excellence in that it imparts the power to discover and appreciate the order and fitness of things in the universe.

Wisdom is the living and intelligent director of all other forces, without which they can serve no useful end. In our investigation of the powers of nature, we cannot rest in the contemplation of forces and effects. We are bound to go on to mind—the greatest of all. Mind is the producer of all other powers, and therefore superior to them. That which is true, in this regard, of the Highest, is true also of man, under the necessary limitations of his position as a creature.

The more that wisdom spreads, the more human strength is saved, and the more is comfort enhanced. The bird who is about to build her nest next month, will toil as long and work as hard as the sparrows and swallows who frequented the temple in the time of Solomon, and the building will be no improvement on the nest of three thousand years ago. But if Solomon's own palace were to be builded anew, modern skill could rear it much faster than Hiram's masonry, and there are few houses in London which do not contain luxuries and accommodations which were lacking in the "house of the forest of Lebanon." Already a pound of coals and a pint of water will do the work of a sturdy man; and with a week's wages, a mechanic may now procure a library more comprehensive and more edifying than that which adorned the Tusculan villa,—nay, such a store of books as the wealth of Solomon could not command [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

It requires but little intellectual sagacity to admire that wisdom which leads to some evident practical result. When self-interest is at stake, the meanest souls can assume a virtue. The steady recognition of wisdom, for her own sake, is only found in answering minds.

The poverty of Jesus, the incarnate Wisdom of God, was sufficient to bring upon Him one of the sharpest trials of His humiliation, which was that of being despised and overlooked.

Verse 17. Quiet men—men of calm and dispassionate minds—give heed to the words of wisdom, though noisy fools may disregard them. Also, in quiet times, in the hours of retirement and reflection, when the distractions of the world are shut out, the words of wisdom come back into the mind and sink into the heart. How unlike in this respect to the cry of him that ruleth among fools! Even at the moment it is uttered, his cry may fall powerless upon the thoughtless, ignorant, or impatient crowd to whom it is addressed; and this it may do for no other and better reason, than because it does not suit the fancy or the frenzy of the hour. At any rate, and in any case, its influence is but transitory, its power short-lived [*Buchanan*].

Folly requires the aid of boisterous acclamation to give it the semblance of greatness. Wisdom is content with quiet and retired ways, there to meet her disciples and untold her treasures. Disdaining the Pharisees device, she sounds no trumpet, but calm as the depths of heaven, speaks to contempla-

tion the everlasting language of truth.

How soon the fame of those who have made the greatest noise and display passes away! It is easily blown up to the bubble reputation, but soon to burst most unprofitably. Time clears away all illusions and lays bare the solidities of truth.

The wise man may speak to an audience fit, though few; but his audience will increase through the ages, and his words receive obedience and recognition.

The mariner who guides his ship upon the trackless ocean with safety and expedition accomplishes this by the aid of principles which were discovered by Grecian geometers ages ago. The words of these quiet thinkers were heard and understood by few, but without them the greatest development of commerce and civilisation would be impossible.

The true rulers of the world, of lasting sovereignty, are those who guide the intellects and souls of men. They have been faithful over a few things, and have thus been made rulers over many cities.

Verse 18. War wounds, but wisdom heals. War overturns, but it is wisdom that builds up and restores. War is the hurricane that sinks the ship; wisdom is the favouring breeze that wafts it to the desired haven. War is the torrent that furrows the earth, and sweeps its soil into the sea; wisdom droppeth softly, like the rain or the gentle dew from heaven, to refresh the thirsty ground and to bless the springing thereof. In a word, war and all its weapons belong to the bloody brood of him who was a murderer from the beginning; wisdom is the attribute and gift of Him who came to bring peace on earth, goodwill to men, and glory to God in the highest [*Buchanan*].

The continued existence of war in the midst of material and intellectual progress is a proof that the world is yet far from wisdom. The reign of force can never knit humanity into a true brotherhood. The Christian religion, which is the highest style of wisdom, is the only strong power, against which all else contends in vain.

The ambition of one man may plunge nations into deadly warfare. The heresies of one man may divide the Church, weaken her influence, and provoke the rage of an irritating controversy. One slanderous tongue can slay many reputations, and work mischiefs which are but ill-repaired by time.

The ways in which one sinner may destroy much good are as numerous as the forms of evil itself. But there is a bad and even a worse eminence in sin. The greater the power abused, the more terrible and far-reaching the consequences. Hence he who writes a book that unsettles the foundations of faith in the soul of man, or robs him of his immortal hope, propagates a mischief far beyond his own working-day in life, and verily keeps his sad account and reckoning with eternity still open.

CHAPTER X.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Dead flies.**] *Lit.*, "Flies of death;" because, as such, they corrupt the ointment. The apothecary.] A dealer in spices. Thus it is not the common kind, but a costly, fragrant unguent that is here intended. A little folly.] Little in proportion to the entire mass of wisdom whose properties and influence it injures. **2. A wise man's heart is at his right hand.**] By the heart we are to understand the *inclinations*, for these influence the understanding and the judgment. The wise man's heart is in its right place. His feelings are on the side of wisdom and truth; and therefore his whole nature. But a fool's heart at his left.] His inclinations are averse from wisdom and truth. He has sinister aims and purposes. **4. The spirit of the ruler rise up against thee.**] A ruler capable of committing great offences against thee, when his spirit is stirred up in anger. **5. As an error which proceedeth from the ruler.**] Not a mere error, as such, but one which is manifest by its consequences—caprices of despotism like those described in verses 6, 7. **6. Folly.**] To be understood, in the concrete form, of mean and ignoble persons, having no title to dignity and advancement. **The rich.**] Men of noble birth and bearing, inheriting an honourable name and patrimony, and qualified to fill exalted positions in the state. This unnatural inversion of the orders of society was not infrequent under the despotism of Eastern monarchs. **7. Servants.**] Not merely in condition, but servile in character, destitute of all noble aims and purposes. Princes.] Both in regard of outward rank, and having a corresponding elevation of character and bearing. They are princely minded. **8. He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it.**] It was the custom, where lions and other wild animals abounded, to dig pits overlaid with branches of trees, in order to entrap them. Hence a man might unwittingly fall into a pit which he had himself digged (Psa. vii. 15, lvii. 6; Prov. xxvi. 27). And whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.] Serpents and other reptiles were often found hiding in old walls. Hence he who broke through them ran the risk of being bitten (Amos v. 19). **9. Removeth stones . . . cleaveth wood, shall be endangered thereby.**] As such employments required violent exertion, they were the more dangerous. **11. A babbler is no better.**] *Lit.*, "The master of the tongue." One who is of ready utterance, capable of producing great effects by the power of speech, yet lacking energy and promptness in action. **12. Gracious.**] His words have the power of winning favour. They have a calm and grateful influence. All his actions are suitable and well-timed, not like those of the unwary serpent-charmer. **14. A fool also is full of words.**] Not only given to endless talk, but even boldly announcing his plans and purposes, as if he could certainly reckon upon the future. The latter part of the verse condemns the folly of such presumption. **15. Wearieth every one of them.**] Though full of words, they are indolent, and soon grow weary in any useful toil. He knoweth not how to go to the city.] He cannot make sure that he shall carry out even so ordinary a purpose and action. Probably St. James (chap. iv. 13) refers to this passage when censuring the boldness which presumes upon a future which no man can certainly know or command. **16. When thy king is a child.**] Not in age, but in understanding—wanting in all the qualities of a vigorous manhood. And thy princes eat in the morning.] They employ in self-indulgence the time which ought to be devoted to serious business. **18. By much slothfulness the building decayeth.**] The "building" is the edifice of the state, which is brought to ruin by the indolence of the rulers. **20. The rich.**] Those of high rank and station, such as the nobles and princes—the counsellors of the king. A bird of the air shall carry thy voice.] In some unknown manner the secret will come out, as if suddenly picked up and borne off by a bird.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—4.

THE EXCELLENCIES OF WISDOM.

I. As seen in the Contrasted Qualities of the Wise Man and the Fool. The intrinsic excellencies of wisdom are clearly manifest to all who have true spiritual insight, and that sympathy which is the best interpreter of its object.

But there are some broad general features of wisdom which strike conviction of their excellence into the mind of every beholder. They are seen to great advantage when we contrast the action of wisdom and folly in regard to the roots or fruits of moral conduct. 1. *As to motive and aim.* The fool's motive or aim is always sinister. He has no straightforward designs and purposes, but deals in what is sly and left-handed. (Verse 2.) The very centre of motion is —as it were—shifted from its true place, and the result is nothing but the utmost moral confusion and disorder. But the motives and aims of the wise man, on the other hand, are pure and right. His heart—the principal fount and spring of action—is in the right place. Hence his character is marked by simplicity, and free from guile. 2. *As to self-knowledge.* The fool is under a complete delusion in regard to himself. He grows exalted in the imagination that he is wise. No revelation of his true self has been vouchsafed to his mind, and in the conceit of ignorance he is both happy and bold. When a fool at length knows that he is such, he has attained to the beginning of wisdom. He has already entered into the outer courts of her temple, and may yet know her mysteries and see her glory. But while this self-knowledge is hidden from him, the worst consequences of ignorance must follow. On the slightest occasions of life, in the common ways of duty and intercourse, his want of wisdom is manifest. He may be even said to proclaim himself a fool. (Verse 3.) He has not even the sense to leave his true character to be discovered by slow inference, or to be concealed by silence and caution; he must needs precipitate the conclusion. Contrast this with the character of the wise man who learns to know himself, and does not bring discredit upon his wisdom by failing to show it when the occasion demands. Such a man will use that discretion, which, if it does not altogether hide his faults, will preserve them from being prominent. 3. *As to self-government.* Men are often placed in circumstances of great provocation where it is difficult to calm the anger that rises in the breast. The case is here supposed where a wise man is confronted with the insolence and tyranny of authority. (Verse 4.) A conflict arises within him between the high sense of justice and the proper reverence due to that authority, as such. But prudence guides the wise man; he has learned to govern his passions, and by a calm demeanour tames the fury which threatened him. But the fool lacks discretion in such trying situations. He is stubborn and unyielding; and for want of self-government, his passion breaks forth to his own injury. He has not the wisdom to wait and be calm, nor the faith to believe in the triumph of the meek. II. As seen in the Exquisite Delicacy of the Wise Man's Character. (Verse 1.) The character of the wise man is here compared to ointment; not of the common sort, but of the perfumer—one which is prepared with rare and costly ingredients. Such a compound may be spoiled and rendered valueless by so small a thing as the decaying remains of flies. Such is the delicacy and rare preciousness of the wise man's character that the beauty and value of it may be impaired by a few faults. Coarse and common things are not easily injured. The chiefest dangers threaten that which is most skilfully and delicately contrived. The risks of such moral disasters arise from the very excellence of the wise man's character. 1. *In such, small blemishes are more conspicuous.* Small blemishes in the character of the fool, standing as they do in the thick multitude of graver faults, easily escape notice. But in the character of the wise man, these are soon detected, as a black spot upon white ground. Men have a keen eye for the occasional weaknesses and indiscretions of human virtue. 2. *In such, small blemishes are more ruinous.* The wise man has an influence for good, and that influence is sensibly abated by even the appearance of shortcomings and moral deformities. He that is in reputation for wisdom and honour may, by retaining but a few faults, greatly fail to benefit mankind to that extent which is warranted by his strong virtues. The fragrance

of a good man's life may be injured, yea, almost changed into a baneful influence, by the admixture of but a few faults and follies.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Those vibrations and disturbances which would not interfere with the proper action of some rude machinery would, in the instruments of the astronomer, be a source of disadvantage and error. The spirit of the wise man is trained to the finest issues, and may be injuriously affected by an apparently small cause.

The imperfection of human nature is such that even the wisdom of the wisest is seldom found unmixed with baser matter.

The wise are a standing rebuke to others, therefore men are prone to exaggerate their faults.

A certain grace and attractiveness of behaviour is necessary to give full effect and influence to the finest assemblage of virtues. In addition to the greatest excellencies, we must have "whatsoever things are lovely."

A man's character is the expression of his true self; in fact, the express image of the invisible things in him. His reputation depends upon the manner in which he is imaged and represented to the eye of society. Hence while the real character of the wise man may not be seriously affected, his reputation may suffer loss.

The principle is especially applicable to a Christian profession; and the best use we can make of it is to exemplify it in some of those flaws and failings which destroy the attraction and impressiveness of men truly devout and God-fearing. Our instances must be taken almost at random; for, like their Egyptian prototypes, these flies are too many to be counted. 1. *Rudeness.* 2. *Irritability.* 3. *Selfishness.* The subject is uninviting, and time would fail did we speak of the parsimony, the indolence, the egotism, the want of intelligence, the want of taste, by which many excellent characters are marred, and by which the glory of the Gospel is often compromised [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Verse 2. Right desires and inclinations are as necessary to the character of the wise man as nobility and strength of mind. They place him in the position of the best advantage for all good and true work.

Fools have no dexterity in duty. They can, at best, but awkwardly imitate the virtues of the wise.

1. A wise man *minds his own proper business;* whereas the fool neglects what belongs to himself, and is exceedingly officious, intermeddling, and full of sagacious counsel, in every one's concerns but his own. Any wisdom he has is "at his left hand," it is applied in the wrong place. 2. The understanding of the wise man is at all times *ready for his immediate direction*—"at his right hand." So that, being steadily applied to its proper business, it is prepared to meet times of emergency. The fool, on the contrary, is ever uncertain, ever at a loss, all hesitation and perplexity. His wisdom is always to seek. 3. That which the wise man does, *his wisdom enables him to do well*—with *skill* and *dexterity.* The fool, when he does anything at all, does it with his left hand; not only applying any little fragments of wisdom he may possess in a wrong direction, but bungling, blundering, and failing, even in that which he attempts [*Wardlaw*].

Verse 3. A fool is mischievous without art, as he is a hypocrite without deceiving. A man must have some understanding to conceal the want of it.

The fool does not need, as the Pharisees did, to sound a trumpet before him. He is his own herald.

That quality of fools by which they quickly reveal themselves, even in the most ordinary intercourse of life, may be reckoned as one of the wise compensa-

tions of Providence; for thus wicked men are often prevented from doing the utmost mischief.

Not that he intends to convey this impression, but that, in point of fact, he does convey it. So long, indeed, as he "holdeth his peace," even "a fool may be counted wise" (Prov. xvii. 28). But he has only to open his lips in order to let out the secret, and to show what he really is. His ignorance, his petulance, his indiscretion, his self-complacency and presumption, let all who meet him know that he is a fool. He talks loudly and confidently on subjects regarding which wiser men hardly venture to give an opinion. The wise are like deep rivers, which flow quietly. The fool is like the shallow stream, which brawls and makes a noise [*Buchanan*].

The fool, having no true self-knowledge, is puffed up with conceit and vanity; therefore he fails rightly to interpret the effects of his own folly upon others. He is the last to detect the derision and contempt which he himself has excited.

Verse 4. The wise man when oppressed by the powerful does not allow himself to be driven by passion into acts of rebellion. He stands firmly at the post of duty, and is content to wait till the indignation be overpast, and audience be given to the still small voice of reason and truth.

Where the obligation of duty is clear, we should not be moved from our steady purpose of obedience by the sudden outburst of unrighteous anger.

There are times when a wise man may abstain from insisting upon his own proper rights. In the conflict with human authority, swayed by fierce passions, he learns meekly to endure, knowing that what is right and true is more likely to have due recognition when those passions have subsided.

If we meet anger with anger, we wage a conflict in which nothing can be gained, and everything may be lost.

There is a wonderful power in the arts of conciliation. A soft answer turneth away wrath; and what is better still, when a man's ways please God, *He* maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. Esther and Mordecai succeeded in getting the persecuting edict of Ahasuerus recalled, by committing their way unto the Lord, and by waiting for the fitting moment to speak. And well it were, for the interests of peace and love, if, in less conspicuous spheres of life, the same prudent course were always followed. How often are lasting enmities and divisions caused simply for want of a little of that yielding, whose power to pacify even great offences Solomon so justly celebrates [*Buchanan*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5—10.

The Promotion of Fools.

The excellencies of wisdom, and the practical uses of it, are evident to all who can feel the force of moral reasoning. Yet the wise often fail of attaining their true place in the world, or having attained it, they are thrust out, and fools set up in their stead. He who is conscious of superior gifts, and rectitude of purpose, is condemned to witness the promotion of men, contemptibly poor in mind and morals, to places of authority and power. How does this perverse disposition of things arise, and wherewith shall good men console themselves in this disappointment? I. It arises from the Interference of Human Caprice with the Proper Tendencies of Social Forces. The setting up of folly in great dignity, and casting down the wise and noble from their seats, is here ascribed "to an error which proceedeth from the ruler." (Verse 5.) Such an unnatural inversion can only proceed from the caprice of some arbitrary authority. It is only possible

through those accidents of history when folly and wickedness gain a temporary advantage. That wisdom which is made up of justice, goodness, and practical sagacity in human affairs, is a social force which has a known direction. But it may be turned aside from this direction by some disturbing causes. The fitness of things, their true tendencies and results, must be acknowledged, though they may be interrupted for a while by some disorder. 1. *It is fitting that the wisest and best should rule.* Such ought to have the highest social influence and power —the chiefest authority in the state. Nations can only maintain their place in the world's history by means of their noblest and wisest men. Their natural decay sets in when these are displaced, and the sovereignty given to fools. There are conditions of national stability that must not be violated, and it is impossible to preserve the social pyramid poised upon its apex. 2. *The most sacred rights of man may be held in abeyance.* Wisdom and goodness ought to secure their proper results, and enjoy with dignity their quiet triumphs. But the existence of *moral evil* introduces a source of complication. It is a disquieting factor in our reckoning of human things. Hence, in this world, what is right does not always prevail. It is the property of evil to hold continual warfare against all order—to rebel against all just dignities—to undo the work of goodness in the world. Thus the progress of humanity towards perfection is retarded. II. It is an Unstable Condition of Things. The wise man may be consoled when he reflects that such social disorder cannot last long. There are certain fundamental principles of national prosperity, and these cannot be long violated with impunity. Retribution comes at length, and the true order returns. There are certain chemical preparations which are said to be unstable, because they are held together by a slender bond, and the slightest force is sufficient to decompose them. In like manner, there are conditions of society brought about by the irrational caprice of wilful men; but such conditions are unstable. They are always upon the point of rupture. Providence, which permits so much, has yet reserves of force by which these evils find correction. In the disorders of human government, fools may be suddenly raised to rank and authority; but they must at length fall to their true level. They can but, as it were, snatch at greatness: they cannot retain it in their grasp. No power can give their unnatural assumption any fixity or permanence. 1. *The devices which procure their promotion may be turned against themselves.* (Verses 8, 9.) They were raised to their dignities by flattery, intrigue—by a ruthless trampling upon the rights of others. They employed dangerous weapons which may, at any moment, be snatched from their hands and used against themselves. He who breaks through the boundaries of truth and right runs the risk of arousing indignant justice. The breakers of old walls—moral, social—shall be avenged by the startled serpent's sting. 2. *Human caprice is not to be trusted.* When men are not governed by great principles, but by passion and folly, they are ever unsteady. You cannot reckon upon them, for nothing can be trusted that does not rest upon the sure foundations of truth and right. The fools which the wilful monarch promotes to power may soon excite his disgust, and give place to other fools who are likely to meet with the same capricious fate. 3. *They lack that fitness which alone can give dignity and efficiency to office.* Wisdom imparts an intellectual and a moral fitness for every duty and trust; and without it, no man can fulfil the highest offices in the community. (1.) *He cannot maintain the dignity proper to them.* Men hold in admiration those who possess wisdom and knowledge. Even the most ignorant learn to regard, with a feeling akin to adoration, those who are more knowing and wiser than they. Men may pay court to the outward splendour of the fool; they may adore the greatness which is thrust upon him, but they despise himself. The pomp and glory of outward circumstance cannot impart true dignity where the solid endowments of moral worth and wisdom are not found. (2.) *He cannot maintain the efficiency of it.* (Verse 10.) Physical strength, or the power of

authority, may accomplish much, but wisdom is necessary for the finest and most ingenious work—for the framing of all purposes that are far-reaching, and the richest in their consequences to man. Human destiny cannot be shaped to the noblest issues by rough tools, though they be wielded with savage strength. There must be the cunning hand—the skilful device—the sharp edge. These are the gifts of wisdom to man, without which he cannot accomplish any work of enduring worth. The power of office and authority is impotent and vain where the highest faculties are blunt.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 5. St. Cyril observeth that in the law whereas if others did sin, God appointed a sacrifice and remedy for them, whether they sinned through ignorance or else with knowledge. In the sin of the High Priest there is not appointed any sacrifice for him if that he sinned by ignorance, "as if by no means there were to be admitted in them that do rule ignorance, or defect of that wisdom required for their position." Besides there had need to be a great care in the ruler that shall choose others to rule and command, because it is a hard thing to discharge it. Nazianzene saith, "It is a hard thing for a man to rule, a most hard thing to instruct and teach men. It seemeth to me to be an art of arts, a science of sciences, to rule man, who is of all creatures most various and changeable" [*Jermin*].

It is hard for ordinary men to conceive of the full nature and strength of those temptations which beset one who is invested with absolute rule. There are positions in which it is hard for ordinary virtue to stand upright. It is no wonder, therefore, that such monarchs have erred.

The most exalted station and complete investiture of authority cannot confer infallibility.

We must not allow errors to pass unheeded because they are connected with great names.

The errors of the mightiest are the most destructive. There is an "energy of position" in things moral and social, as well as in the region of matter. When power is wrongly directed, the disaster is proportioned to its magnitude.

Verse 6. There is no function belonging to rulers which they are bound to exercise with greater impartiality, prudence, and caution, than that of selecting men who are to fill the great offices of the state. These men have oftentimes the destinies of a nation in their hands. . . . . To place, out of mere favouritism or caprice, or even from a want of sufficient care and enquiry, an unrighteous or incompetent judge in the seat of justice; an ignorant or dishonest administration in charge of the revenues of a country; a cruel or rapacious governor at the head of the province of the kingdom; an unskilful or inexperienced leader in the command of an army;—for rulers to do such things is to trifle with interests of the greatest magnitude, and to betray a trust of the most solemn and responsible kind [*Buchanan*].

The highest honours and dignities must sit ungainly upon those who are not prepared for them by sufficient training and capacity. In the obscurest station, folly is a disadvantage, a noticeable evil; but in the most exalted station, it becomes conspicuous and most fully exposed to the eye of ridicule.

When a fool is set in dignity, it is as when a handful of hay is set up to give light, which with smoke and smell offendeth all that are near it. When the worthy sit in a low place, it is as when a goodly candle, that on a table would give a comfortable and comely light, is put under a bushel [*Jermin*].

When men of true nobility of mind and character are pushed from their seats, they still adorn the lowliest place

where they are constrained to sit. They suffer most who cast them down.

Verse 7. No change of outward condition can alter what is essential in the character. The servile mind is not destroyed by the elevation from poverty to grandeur, nor do royal minds cease to be such when they are stripped of all outward marks of greatness.

It was far from being a very uncommon case, under the despotic government of the East; slaves of the palace being not unfrequently, from caprice, partiality, or secret selfishness, advanced to the highest ranks, to look down in haughty superciliousness on their natural and deserving superiors [*Wardlaw*].

Verse 8. He who seeks prosperity and distinction by treacherous ways, or by breaking through the bounds of moral restraint, tempts the vengeance of Heaven.

He who frames designs for the destruction of others is working on the utmost edge of danger.

There are proper boundaries to knowledge as well as to the courses of conduct. He who by needless curiosity adventures to break through them, only prepares misery for himself—the anguish of a restless and unsatisfied mind.

When ambitious heads break through hedges to get to high places, there is a serpent lurking secretly, which bites them by the heel and either stops them from going on, or else bringeth by it some great mischief upon them. Or else the serpent that biteth these ambitious subtle workers is some other more subtle than they, by whom they are undermined in their plots. Indeed, when ambition is set upon it, no hedge, no wall is able to hold it, but it breaks through, and leaps over all. What hedges did Athaliah break, killing all the royal progeny that herself might reign? What hedges did Abimelech break, killing seventy of his brethren that himself might rule? What hedges did Absalom break that he might be king in Israel? But did not the serpent bite them all? [*Jermin.*]

Verse 9: The man who sets himself to pull down or to alter the fabric of the constitution of a country, undertakes a work of no light or trifling difficulty, and a work always of hazard to himself, and very often of fearfully doubtful benefit to others. It is a vast deal easier to find fault than to mend; to complain of what is wrong, than to substitute what is right [*Wardlaw*].

Most men have penetration enough to discover the faults in things that are established, but the knowledge of the deep principles upon which they rest, and by which they are held together, is the possession of only a few. He who attempts the work of a reformer, without sufficient knowledge and prudence, is likely to meet with ill-success and to bring trouble upon himself.

There are times when the corruptions of existing things have grown so great as to demand violent measures for their reformation. But the zeal thus aroused is a dangerous weapon in the hands of frail man.

Verse 10. A little skill expended in sharpening the edge, will save a great deal of strength in wielding the hatchet. But, just as the unskilful labourer who cannot handle the whetstone must belabour the tree with a blunt instrument, and after inflaming his palms and racking his sinews, achieves less result than his neighbour whose knowledge and whose knack avail instead of brute force, so the servant who does not know the right way to do his work, after all his fatigue and fluster will give less satisfaction than one who has learned the best and easiest methods; and the householder who knows nothing of the mechanic arts, or who knows not what to do when sickness or emergencies occur, must compensate by the depth of his purse, or by the strength of his arm, for the defects of his skill. A blunt axe implies heavy blows and an aching arm; coarse work with a blistered hand. But "wisdom is profitable to direct."

Intelligence is as good as strength, and a little skill will save both time and materials, money and temper [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Even in the most righteous cause, great strength and determination of character will lead a man into many evils unless he has skill and prudence to guide him.

Mere force is blind, and must be directed to proper ends and uses by those who have the power to see.

The triumphs of man over the fierceness and strength of the brute creation, and over all the difficulties which nature places in his way, are the triumphs of mind.

Wisdom gives that fine edge to effort by which many difficulties, that otherwise offer a complete resistance, are easily cleft through.

Wisdom is the director of all forces which can be brought under the control of man. Without intelligent guidance, they cannot become effective for the best ends.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11—15.

The Vanity of Speech.

Human wisdom has been shown to be, in some cases, unavailing, through the sudden advantage that may be gained by folly. So many are the instances of apparent failure that a reflecting mind, tn certain sad moods of thought, may be tempted to imagine that this landed possession is but another of the many vanities of human life. In particular, speech itself, which professes to manifest the inmost glory of wisdom, may be regarded as, after all, but a splendid vanity. I. The Essential Value of Speech must be Admitted. There are many instances in which the wisest speech seems to fail. This faculty, however, must be regarded as, in itself, a good gift. 1. *Speech rightly employed wins favour.* (Verse 12.) By the graciousness of speech, a wise man wins his way to favour, and conquers the minds and hearts of others. The gift of graceful speech is a splendid talent, though it may be degraded to serve the worst purposes. Hence the tongue is called "an ornament of iniquity." (James iii. 6.) It is capable of presenting error with seductive charms, and making the worst appear the better reason. Still, the gift of speech may be employed to enhance the attractions of wisdom, and graciously subdue men's hearts to the love of her. 2. *Speech rightly employed is powerful.* (Verse 11.) The enchanter has the power of controlling the serpent so that it forgets to sting. While the strange spell lasts, the venomous reptile is rendered harmless. The tongue, in like manner, can perform the office of a magician, and so persuade and charm men as to calm their most boisterous passions and render them harmless and obedient to the charmer's will. In some critical juncture, the speech of a wise man may bring relief to a nation's perplexity, and save it from ruin. The uttered word of man has proved mightier than the sword. It is the most powerful and lasting of all influences. Good and wise words are seeds, most tenacious of vitality, reproducing themselves from age to age in noble and heroic deeds. Speech, inasmuch as it is the vehicle of mind, must have the chief place among the instruments which man uses for carrying on his work in the world. But in some of those sad moods of reflection, into which the mind will sometimes fall, there is much to tempt a man to account even this brilliant gift a vanity. II. Even in the Hands of the Wise, this Gift requires the Greatest Dexterity. On the supposition that wise men were always wise, we might well suppose that their speech would, at all times, be seasonable and full of grace. But the actual state, even of the best, falls below this ideal. The wisest and the meekest man on earth is in danger of speaking unadvisedly with his lips. The most devoted saint must take heed that he sin not with his tongue. Hence he who can so control his speech as not to offend at all has well nigh

reached perfection. In order to manage the gift of speech rightly, it is necessary that we have something more than an ample store of wisdom's gatherings and the faculty of graceful utterance. 1. *There must be vigilance.* The wisest man may fail through want of vigilance in certain crises of danger, and thus bring himself under the charge and the penalties of folly. The charmer possesses the art of rendering the serpent harmless, but if he stumbles upon it unawares, he shall be bitten like an ordinary man. So if the wise man is unwatchful, or does not speak at the right time; if he misses his opportunity or is wanting in discretion, notwithstanding his ability to represent the wealth of thought and feeling in words of power, he too must smart, as the veriest fool, under the grief and penalties of failure. There are certain junctures in human affairs which may nonplus unwatchful wisdom. 2. *There must be prompt action.* The richest gifts of wisdom must be accompanied by practical ability; or they may fail of success. A wise man may lack the power of grappling with emergencies, and may become so stunned by some sudden perplexity as to be totally unfit for the proper action of the time. There are so many sudden and unexpected changes in the course of human affairs, that unless the wise man, though gifted with the most persuasive speech, has the ability promptly to adapt himself to the occasion, he may be vanquished as though he were not wise. III. This Gift is often the Instrument and Revealer of Folly. (Verses 13—15.) The mind and heart—the nature of the man within—may be regarded as the fountain of speech. As that fountain is sweet or bitter, troubled or clear, live-giving or pestilential, so are the streams which flow from it. Speech is the instrument by which the mind conveys and distributes its wisdom or folly. Hence the fool soon reveals himself; for when he ventures to speak, his folly is sure of instant recognition. Some of the characteristics of the speech of such are noted here. 1. *It shows no tendency towards improvement.* (Verse 13.) The speech of the fool does not follow the method of creation, where confusion and disorder improved into harmony and beauty. It shows no tendency to assume a higher state, no power to work itself clear. The disorder which marked his first utterance becomes more observable as he proceeds, so that by the time he has made an end of speaking he has outraged reason itself. He grows loquacious. There is scarcely any pause in his insipid and tiresome twaddle. (Verse 14.) He does but win fresh titles of folly every time he speaks, and his last utterance is the most extravagant of all. 2. *The effects of it are destructive.* Foolish speech, though incapable of deceiving those who have discernment, is likely to affect others injuriously, and to grow into a source of mischief. (Verse 13.) It is a stream which, gathering foulness as it proceeds, poisons the air. There is a kind of moral contagion in the words of a fool; and considering how many minds are predisposed to it, the mischief is immense. But the fool's speech is more especially *destructive to himself.* (Verse 12.) He may be said to commit moral suicide—himself the gulf which swallows up his reputation. 3. *It is concerned with subjects in which a discreet silence should be observed.* (Verses 14, 15.) The fool is apt to talk confidently about the future, as if he could command it and make it sure He rushes boldly into matters concerning which he knows least. This has a most injurious effect upon himself. *It consumes his energies in useless toil.* (Verse 15.) Such a confident way of dealing with future things *shows an unwarrantable presumption.* No man can know those things which are hidden in the dark recesses of futurity, where they lie open to the eye of God alone. To speak of the future as if we could command it, and know what lies hid in it, is manifest presumption. Even the *most common facts and events of the future are so concealed from man that he cannot, in the conduct of his affairs, reckon upon them* He may purpose such an ordinary act as that of going to the city at such and such a time, but he cannot be sure that he shall accomplish this. (Verse 15.) In the front of this awful fact of human ignorance, all daring presumption in speech and conduct must be contemptible and

vain. It is an abuse of the divine gift of language when it is thus made the instrument of arrogance and folly, and the multitude of such abuses in the world may cause even a wise man, in some gloomy season of the soul, to reckon this boasted faculty with the sum total of human vanity.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 11. In the East, there have always been persons who, by means of music and legerdemain, exert great influence over some species of serpents, so that whilst under their spell the deadly cobra may be handled, as if he were utterly harmless. But if the charmer tread on the snake unawares, or be bitten when off his guard, he will be poisoned like another man. And to certain minds there has been given an ascendancy over other minds, like the influence of the serpent-charmer. Sagacious and eloquent, they are able to soothe the fury of fierce tempers, and mould rancorous natures to their will. Like David's transforming harp, as the strain advances, it looks as if a new possession had entered the exorcised frame, and a seraph smiled out at those windows where a demon was frowning before. But alas for the harper, if Saul should snatch the javelin before David has time to touch the strings! Alas for the wise charmer, and also for the good cause, if the tyrant's passion towers up, or the decree of the despot goes forth before a friendly counsellor has time to intervene [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

"The master of the tongue"—the man of ready and wise speech—may fail in matters of ordinary life through want of the power of quickly adapting himself to the occasion. To ensure success in a world like this, where so many hidden dangers lie ready to spring upon us, we must have tact as well as talent.

While under the power of the eloquent tongue, fierce natures may be wielded at will; but when the charm is dissolved their virulence returns.

He who gives to his tongue an unrestrained license, and is guided in the use of it neither by principle nor by prudence, is a man that requires to be managed with peculiar caution. Contradiction and violence may only irritate, and make the venom of his tongue the more virulent and deadly. He must be *charmed* [*Wardlaw*].

Verse 12. "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious." 1. They win the favour of the hearers. It is pleasant to listen to them—to be near the fountains of wisdom. 2. They minister good to the hearers. They convey those treasures of the mind and heart which are the impulse of all goodness in life, and the most enduring possession of man.

The words of wise men have a gentle, yet all-prevailing force. In morals, this is a pleasing constraint, a drawing of the affections. It corresponds to attraction in the physical universe.

The gracious words of Christ, who was incarnate wisdom, are still powerful in drawing the nations to Himself.

The fool is the sepulchre of his own reputation; for as long as he was silent, you were willing to give him credit for the usual share of intelligence, but no sooner does he blurt out some astounding blunder—no sooner does he begin to prattle forth his egotism and vanity, than your respect is exchanged for contempt or compassion [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

As the Psalmist says when speaking of such men as he, "They make their own tongue to fall upon themselves" (lxiv. 8). It was the folly of Herod that made him utter the rash promise, which stained his soul with the crime of murder. It was the folly of another Herod that prompted the profane and self-glorying oration, which drew down upon him the vengeance of the Almighty [*Buchanan*].

Verse 13. The speech of the fool shows no tendency towards improvement as he proceeds. It is sure to degenerate into unmeaning rant, and to arouse passions which are hurtful to himself and to others.

There is a ridiculous disproportion between the passionate language of a fool and the insignificant causes which excite it.

There is as much difference between the chastised fervour of the wise man's words, and the impudent rage of fools, as there is between the warmth and glow of health and the burning of a fever.

We have here the serpent, the babbler spoken of in Verse 11, wreathed into a circle, his two ends, head and tail, meeting together. And as at the one end he is a serpent having his sting in his head, so at the other end he is a scorpion having his sting in his tail [*Jermin*].

Verse 14. A fool vainly imagines that mere words are knowledge and wisdom. Hence he easily lends himself to a flattering delusion to conceal the poverty of his mind.

Wisdom is content with few words. The most important truths have been condensed into the smallest compass. The precious things of the mind are thus rendered portable.

He is like the empty drum that sounds at the lightest touch. His self-conceit persuades him that he is competent to decide, off-hand, matters on which deeper, more thoughtful, more conscientious minds are slow to say anything at all. "A man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?" These are difficulties which wiser men feel and acknowledge . . . . . The wise man waits for more light. The case is not ripe for judgment—he can as yet neither approve nor disapprove; he can neither acquit nor condemn; and accordingly he refrains his lips. Not so the fool. He is the first, the longest, and the loudest in every discussion [*Buchanan*].

Fools are always most confident concerning the unknown and inscrutable.

That balanced condition of the mind, in which it is content to remain released from belief, is so uncommon that we have no word in our language to represent it. Every ignorant and foolish man has a stiff opinion upon those subjects in which his knowledge is least.

Verse 15. Folly makes a man both a weariness to himself and to his neighbours. They grow impatient of his blunders and busy zeal of fruitless labour.

The fool is most confident in that wherein he ought to show the greatest modesty and reserve. He speaks of the accomplishment of his plans for the future with the same assurance as if he had read them distinctly in the Book of Fate.

The fool he has in view is a culpable fool—is one whose folly has much more of the moral than of the intellectual, in the defect which it indicates and implies. He is one whose heart is much further wrong than his head. The tongue of a mere imbecile cannot bite like a serpent. . . . . In the highest and truest sense of the word, all wicked men are fools. There is a city—a mighty city—a glorious city—to which not one of them knows how to go; and that is the New Jerusalem, the city of the living God [*Buchanan*].

Fools (in the moral signification of the term), when they stand before some great conviction, waken up to the discovery that what they thought was knowledge was only words, resting upon no realities. They learn, like Job, the language of penitence and submission (Job xlii. 5, 6).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 16—20.

The True Life of the State.

As in individuals, so in states, there is a certain standard of health. There are conditions of vigour and decay. They cannot long hold any life or prosperity which is not founded upon moral goodness. The true life of the state may be considered, I. As to the Sources by which it is Nourished: All life must draw support, and materials for repair and development, from something beyond itself. No creature can live upon its own blood. Nations can only maintain their true life and prosperity by due supplies of the proper nourishment of that life. It is especially necessary that those who govern should possess the highest excellencies —moral—intellectual—social. 1. *They should have superior endowments of mind and heart.* (Verse 17.) They should be "sons of nobles," not only by derivation and rank, but nobles in reality; men who are distinguished by that elevation of mind, those qualities of heart and temper, and that dignified bearing by which they are fitted for the difficult and responsible work of government. 2. *They should be diligent in duty.* Rulers have certain duties arising from the relations in which they stand to those over whom they are placed. Hence they need not only ability, but also zeal and diligence in their calling. They should be distinguished by industry, two main channels of which are indicated here. (1) *They should maintain the efficiency of what is good.* The edifice of state, like a house, is exposed to constant wear, and the slow decays of time. The beauty and use of it must be preserved by repair and renovation. The inherent goodness of institutions will not save them from destruction. They must be maintained in efficiency by constant diligence and care. (Verse 18.) (2) *Necessary improvements and reforms should be made.* Time reveals what is weak, or no longer potent. Hence wise legislators will study the peculiar necessities of the age; and upon a wider basis of facts and experience, will endeavour to carry the science of government to greater perfection. All human institutions need reform. They have no natural immortality, and only maintain their potency by renewal of life. (3) *They should exercise moral control.* (Verses 16, 17.) It is necessary in those who presume to lead mankind that the faculty of reason should be strong and clear, the judgment ready to decide with firmness whatever that reason approves. But this excellence of mind cannot be attained except by the mastery of the appetites and passions. When princes begin the day in rioting and excess, the animal surmounts the rational, justice and judgment fail, and the land fares ill. When moral control is exercised by those who rule, when they eat "for strength, and not for drunkenness," their powers and energies of mind and heart are most effective for their high duties. Such men renew the life of the state. They are fitted to receive and exercise that wisdom which is profitable to direct, alike in the most retired as well as in the most public ways of life. II. The Causes of its Decline. There are several forms of folly which, in the course of time, must wear out the life of states and bring them to the condition of dead empires. 1. *Intellectual and moral imbecility in their rulers.* (Verse 16.) When the king is a "child" in mind and in character, inexperienced and thoughtless, having no manly vigour, no stable virtue, the nation he rules over is exposed to the worst fate. The more absolute the authority, the greater the ills which follow when those who wield it have not reached maturity of wisdom and skill. There are child-like qualities, beautiful in their own order and circumstance, but beyond these, intolerable and disastrous. A child must not hold the helm of the state. 2. *Habits of luxury and dissipation.* (Verses 17, 19.) When kings give way to gluttony and intemperance, their

moral influence must decline, they are rendered insensible to the real evils around them, and powerless to contend against those dangers by which the State is threatened. The contagion of their example is likely to spread rapidly through their subjects, and, as history has often witnessed, the nation unconquerable by the foe has become weakened by luxury, and rendered an easy prey to the invader. But such habits in rulers are marked by a deeper shade of guilt when they are defended by a shameless boldness and bravado. Evil men, on the seat of authority, are not ashamed to avow a vicious code of duty, to utter some miserable dictum with the vain conceit of appearing smart. Such an attempt to justify excess and riot is described in Verse 19. (1) *They plead the abundant provisions of nature for self-indulgence.* There is the feast—why should they not carouse, and enjoy to the full? There is the wine—why should they not be merry? Were not these things made for the use of man, and do they not confer with appetite to urge him to the highest enjoyment? Thus far can folly render men insensible to the delicacies and moralities of speech. (2) *They assert the omnipotence of gold.* "Money answereth all things." They are insensible to the noblest influences and powers, and imagine that money can achieve every purpose, and satisfy every desire; that gold is an apology for every crime, and answers all charges. Thus folly attains to the bad eminence of the utmost heights of impertinence. III. The Cautions which even Wise Men must Observe who Desire its Welfare. The moral and intellectual faculties of such men are not impaired by vicious indulgence, but enhanced by careful culture and soberness of life. By their talents and virtue they contribute to the strength and preservation of the State. They are an influence for good, a standing rebuke to evil, the promoters of wise reforms. Such men might be tempted to impatience under the evils depicted here, and in the greatness of their zeal for the cause of justice, commit themselves to violent measures for reformation. Therefore prudence is necessary. 1. *They must avoid too hasty an expression of feeling.* (Verse 20.) The king, and the councillors who are associated with him in the government, may be corrupt in their administration. This is a sore trial for men of delicate moral sense and high convictions of justice. Yet the wise man must restrain his feelings, and forbear to curse such rulers, even in his thought. The sense of indignation, though justly roused, might lead such to *hasty action*, and cause a righteous struggle to end in defeat. 2. *They have to consider that the injudicious promotion of a good cause may lead to serious evils.* It is not expedient to speak out every conviction of the mind. The wise will learn to maintain a judicious reserve. Mere fragments of speech may be taken up by tale-bearers, and so combined and distributed as greatly to distort and misrepresent what was spoken. Hence, in a world like this, prudence in every course of conduct is necessary; for without it, virtue itself is but a weak and insufficient defence.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 16. Read in the light of this contrast, *child* must obviously mean a child in capacity—a silly Absalom, or a self-willed Rehoboam—a man destitute of the gravity, and intelligence, and experience, and still more destitute of the high sense of responsibility and duty, which true wisdom inspires; a man more taken up about his own amusements and pleasures than with the affairs and interests of his kingdom. In such hands everything must speedily fall into inevitable disorder. The courtiers would be sure, with their customary servility, to copy the idleness and loose living of the king. It is this, no doubt, that is pointed at by the "princes eating"—that is, feasting—"in the morning." The morning in all countries, and especially in the East, was devoted by princes to public affairs. Then it was that, as judges, they sat in

the gate, to hear and determine the causes and questions which the people might have to bring before them; or that they assembled in the council chambers to deliberate on the great matters of the state [*Buchanan*].

Ill fares the land when the king is intellectually weak, luxurious, and depraved. His administration is likely to be defective, and even vicious; his exalted position renders his example the more dangerous.

Good and wise institutions cannot preserve a nation from destruction, unless they are administered by good and wise men.

Illustrious names should be supported by illustrious virtues and capacities.

Verse 17. A king, the son of nobles, is one possessing true nobility of mind. To be merely of high lineage would, of itself, be no security for the possession of those qualities of which Solomon here evidently intends to speak. Neither virtue nor wisdom is the necessary accompaniment of high birth. In all periods of the world's history, from Solomon's time until now, it has been a thing only too common to find far-descended princes who had nothing else but their pedigree of which to boast—whose personal qualities were as low and base as their ancestry was illustrious and exalted. Wisdom is not hereditary—it does not run in the blood—as Solomon's own son sufficiently proved [*Buchanan*].

The senses and appetites, when they are under the control of wisdom, may be made the servants of virtue.

When the indulgence of appetites, lawful in themselves, is carried to excess, or pursued for its own sake, it is a proof that the animal man sinks both the rational and the spiritual. Nations must "seek those things which are above," if they would prosper.

Verse 18. A house requires not only to be built, but to be kept up. If a man, from laziness, after having got his habitation reared, will not be at the trouble of necessary repairs, a damage that is at first trifling will imperceptibly increase, and will be followed by others till the building comes to be in danger. Day after day, as the time for purposed or half-purposed exertion comes round, the sluggard yawns out to himself the same convenient assurance, that a few hours can make no difference, till by daily procrastination the repair becomes impracticable, and the decayed and shattered tenement "falls through" [*Wardlaw*].

There are three great fellowships of men, the Family, the State, the Church, which are so many buildings of God. In each of these, slothfulness is an evil fraught with the utmost danger.

No institution can live merely upon the history of the past. The skill and activity of the living present must constantly repair the wrongs of time. It does not suffice even for Christianity itself that it has a firm historical basis. It needs also a living and ever-active Director.

Slothfulness, whether in the things of man or God, is the forerunner of a gradual, yet sure decay.

Verse 19. Men's lusts are very expensive, they will not get their slothfulness and excess maintained without much money; the consideration whereof should make them more sober and diligent. For their words import that sensual rulers must have money, and may be looked upon as including an argument to dissuade them from laziness and excess taken from the effect thereof, which is the poverty of the people, who must give to them that "money which answereth all things" [*Nisbet*].

As men yield to the allurements of evil, the power and delicacy of the mind and conscience become impaired. Such are satisfied and lulled by the meanest excuses.

When we consider the power and influence which are secured by gold, we do not wonder that it has turned the heads of some. They have accepted the worship of it as a religion—a sure refuge from every evil—a means of justification.

Verse 20. A righteous man may be so provoked by existing evils, that he cannot prevent the sense of indignation from rising in his breast. Yet the duty of restraining his feelings by a sober and calculating prudence is laid upon him by the constitution of society, and it is part of his trial here.

There is a respect due to office and authority, as such, independently of their moral character. Every ordinance of God may become corrupt by human vices, yet the fact of their Divine appointment remains.

When once thought is uttered in speech, it is often like a stone flung from the hand; we have no further power over it, and know not where it will light or with what results.

This is a strong proverbial form of speech, expressive of the strange and unaccountable way in which such matters are frequently detected. They come to light—nobody knows how. The course they have followed leaves no traces by which it can be searched out. It is as if "a bird of the air had carried the voice." You are as much at a loss as the Syrian monarch was, when Elisha the prophet "told the king of Israel the words that he spoke in his bed-chamber" [*Wardlaw*].

The earth is not a place of secrecy. It is scarcely in the power of earthly frailty to keep anything secret and concealed. Wherefore St. Paul was taken up to the third heaven, when he heard things that might not be uttered: according as St. Ambrose noteth upon it, who saith, "Paul heard some secrets of wisdom which he was forbidden to make known to others, and therefore he was taken up into Paradise" [*Jermin*].

There is a Heavenly King who has immediate note of the most secret suggestions of the mind, and to whose ears are borne even the whispers of rebellion.

CHAPTER XI.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Cast thy bread upon the waters.**] "Bread," rendered in Isaiah xxviii. 28, "bread corn." It has been supposed that there is an allusion to the manner of sowing the seed-corn of the rice plant during the time of the flooding of the fields. But it is doubtful whether this kind of grain was cultivated in Judea in the times of Solomon. The peculiarity of Egyptian agriculture may have suggested this image, where the seed is sown literally "upon the waters" before the inundation of the Nile has subsided. Perhaps the writer had no peculiar usage of agriculture in his mind, but by a bold figure represents a free-handed benevolence which does not too nicely calculate cost and results. **2. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight.**] "Seven and eight" and similar combinations are often used in the sense of undefined plurality. (Mich. v. 5, Prov. xxx. 15, Amos i. 3.) The meaning here is clear: seven must not be the limit, but rather "seven and more." **3. And if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.**] This figure is suitable to represent the idea of irrevocable Divine judgments overtaking man; but it may be doubted whether it requires that idea. The more probable signification, and more suitable to the theme of these verses, is given by Lange: "The utility of the tree remains the same, whether it falls upon the ground of a possessor bordering it to the north or to the south; if it does not profit the one, it does the other. And it is just so with the gifts of love; their fruit is not lost, although they do not always come to light in the manner intended." **5. The way of the spirit.**] Lit. *The way of the wind.* The same word signifies both wind and spirit. The double meaning may be taken as most in harmony with the latter part of the verse. We cannot track and discover all the mysteries of nature. (John iii. 8.) Nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child.] The formation of man's physical nature in the womb has always been regarded as peculiarly mysterious. (Psa. cxxxix. 13–16.) **6. And in the evening withhold not thine hand.**] Lit. "towards evening." Be diligent both early and late. Either this or that.] Either the labour of the morning or of the evening. **7. Truly the light is sweet.**] Light as the symbol of life. (Psa. xxxvi. 9, Job iii. 20.) **8. Yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.**] Days of misfortune and gloom in this world, and a yet longer season in the dark sojourn of the dead. In the imperfect revelation of the time, the state of the departed was considered as dark and cheerless. All that cometh is vanity.] Everything that happens in the course of the world's history and in daily life; more especially

every man, since men are the prime movers and chief figures in all these things. **9. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth.]** These words need not be understood as ironical. There is a sober and healthy joy which is consistent with the remembrance of the judgment. **And walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes.]** There are lawful pleasures both for the heart and eyes; yet in all these things the solemn reckoning of the future must be kept in view. **10. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart.]** The word signifies "sorrow, dissatisfaction," not as in the LXX. and Vulgate, "anger." The command to "rejoice," in verse 9, is here followed by a warning against the opposite state of feeling. **Put away evil from thy flesh.]** Evil in the sense of misfortune—some evil condition of life.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

The Precepts of Benevolence.

Benevolence is goodness considered, not as an internal state, but as an active habit. As such, it needs the direction of principles and rules, otherwise this genial impulse may degenerate into softness, and fail in various ways of producing the highest possible good. Precepts and rules are but the true method of performing any work or duty when that method is interpreted in language. Benevolence has its precepts. **I. Learn to Venture Much.** (Verse 1.) We are not certain that our kindest works shall have their proper effect, either in winning the gratitude or securing the permanent benefit of others. In the moral, as well as in the natural, world, there is an appearance of waste and failure. Yet the impulse of benevolence must not from hence be discouraged, nor wait for the time of action till it has the fullest assurance of success. We must learn to venture much, for we have often to cast our seeds of kindness "upon the waters," not knowing whither they will be carried, often, too, with as little prospect of reaping any ultimate good as if we scattered them upon the barren foam of the sea. The prospect of immediate success must not be our motive. We have to act upon a higher and a nobler principle. 1. *We must learn to do good for its own sake.* It destroys the nobility of goodness if we are anxious to ascertain what profit we shall have. Moral action that depends entirely upon the spur of reward only belongs to the lowest degrees of spiritual life. The angels do all for love and nothing for reward. The highest virtue is bold to act, indulges in the liberties of a free spirit, and is contented with the luxury of doing good. 2. *We must have faith in the imperishableness of good deeds.* It is true that the promise of immortality is only to the doer himself. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John ii. 17.) Much of his work must perish, tainted as it is with human infirmity, and imperfect. Yet all that is of sterling value in it shall abide. Good deeds springing from the fount of purity and unselfishness can never die. They are preserved for ever in the favourable remembrance of God. Even in the present life we are permitted to see some of the fruits and rewards of them. The long delay of their due recognition and recompense may discourage us, but if we are faithful and unwearied in duty we shall see fruit "after many days." 3. *We must consider that the issues and rewards of our life are with God.* In allowing our goodness freely to spend itself, we are imitating the property of our Heavenly Father, and we may safely leave with Him our keeping and our reward. He knows all the issues of the good man's life, and all the riches of his sure recompense in eternity. These are greatly hidden from us here; therefore, in the meantime, we must learn the uses of that faith which ventures all. Venture is the very soul of the religious life—the attitude of the righteous towards the great things of God yet to be revealed; and the spirit of it penetrates all the forms of duty. **II. Do not adopt a Quantitative Standard of Duty.** (Verse 2.) We must not order our benevolence by a

sold, arithmetical law If the purpose to bless seven candidates for our good offices be the limit we have set to our charity, that limit should not be so final and irreversible as to prevent us from extending our kindness yet to another, if he also stands in need of our favour. 1. *True goodness is above the tyranny of minute maxims and rules.* That portion of moral conduct which consists in doing good to others has its own laws; but these are wide. Like the laws of nature, they are general and all-pervading. They cannot be represented by a severe and formal code, which does not rise above the letter, and knows nothing of that generous and free spirit of goodness which giveth life. The loving heart disdains the suggestions of that austere and cynical spirit of economy which says, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" (John xii. 5.) The highest goodness acknowledges no law but the law of love. 2. *True goodness often secures a grateful return of favours.* "Thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." It is, therefore, wise and prudent to create an interest beforehand, so that we may have succour in the day of calamity. We know not what disaster may cast us upon the kindness of others. Let us, therefore, by the deeds of love, make them our friends now. There is a reward which comes to the good man from society. In the time of prosperity he needs it for his encouragement; but in the time of adversity, it may be his very health and life. 3. *True goodness has always some beneficial results.* (Verse 3.) Through the ingratitude of mankind, and the moral perversity that is in the world, our good deeds may often seem to fail. Yet they will have some grateful issue—some precious results which cannot altogether die. These may fall out in quite a different direction from the course of our expectation. In any way, there will be benefit and blessing. The utility of the tree is not destroyed whether it falls to the north or to the south. In any case it will be a profit to some one. III. Do not Act by Constraint. (Verse 3.) 1. *The constraint of law can never produce the highest goodness.* It is possible for a man to do the deeds of kindness, not so much from love as from a sense of right. In the same proportion as he acts herein from any external constraint does he fail to rise to the true nobility of goodness. "The quality of mercy is not strained." 2. *The only constraint should be that of love.* If the clouds be "full of rain" they must burst in showers of blessing upon the earth. They are the natural image of a heart that can hold out no more, that blesses by a sweet constraint, and in doing good to others relieves itself. The highest natures are not ashamed to own the gracious necessity under which they are laid by love. IV. Be not Over-Cautious. (Verse 4.) He who is always watching with nervous anxiety the wind and rain, and must have the most perfect conditions before he begins his work, can only meet with but poor success. There is a certain boldness about true feeling that does not wait till all is clear and perfectly ascertained. In the uncertainties of the present life, there is a moral obligation to act upon imperfect evidence, upon assurances whose solidity is not quite beyond a doubt. The impulse of affection and love will often carry a man beyond the warrant of the logical understanding. He who is timid and hesitating cannot accomplish much good. It is best to follow the promptings of the generous heart, whithersoever they will lead, without waiting for that assurance of certainty which is never perfectly given to man in this life. In moral action, over-refinements are dangerous—they are *impracticable.* Therefore, he who waits for action till the most complete conditions favour him may have long to wait, and must suffer many disadvantages. 1. *He must lose many opportunities of doing good.* If a man does not attempt the duty lying immediately before him, the opportunity may slip away for ever. He must be poor in good works who makes too careful a selection of what he shall do. 2. *Such delay tends to paralyse effort.* Caution is a valuable principle when used to secure accuracy in moral conduct, and to enable a man to walk surefootedly in this present life. But over-caution amounts

to a disease, relaxes the sinews of effort, and impairs the moral force. He who puts off the doing of good actions, from time to time, loses the healthfulness which a vigorous activity would give him, and in the end scarcely accomplishes anything. **V. Be Earnest and Untiring.** (Verse 6.) Earnestness and perseverance are the sure conditions of ultimate success. The holy examples of all the wise and good, and the solemn verities amidst which we now live, alike enforce these upon us. This earnestness and untiring devotion to every good work implies—1. *A wide and varied action.* It extends throughout every part of our working time—from "morning" till "evening." It is distributed over an ample field, and embraces opportunities on every side. It implies—2. *A surer and more plentiful reward.* If we sow with a liberal and diligent hand, some seeds will be sure to spring up. We may be discouraged by the appearance of a waste of power. God may destroy some of the seeds we sow, but He will preserve others. The work of the morning, or the work of the evening, may perish, yet we may fondly hope that one of them, at least, will succeed. In any case, the diligent worker shall see *some* profit of his labour. Then, too, the *success may happen to be very great.* "Thou knowest not . . . whether they both shall be alike good." The law still holds in every case, "He that soweth plentifully shall reap plentifully." **VI. Consider that God often Hides from Us the Success of Our Work.** (Verse 5.) It is not possible for us to know the full extent of the impressions we make upon the minds and hearts of others. The good seed we sow may be borne very far, and quite beyond our observation and knowledge ripen into precious fruit. God, in this thing also, does hide Himself. Our works, as well as the deepest things of our soul, are laid up with Him, awaiting that Judgment which shall make all things manifest. The labours of love cannot be fully reckoned up in this world. This ignorance of the whole cause of our success is—1. *A necessity of our present condition.* Man is still the greatest mystery to himself. The delicacy of the human spirit is such that it is impossible to say how far it is affected by the words and acts of another. In our present imperfect stage we cannot have full light either upon the reasons of God's dealings, or upon the issues of our conduct. This ignorance, in both cases, may be a *necessary discipline.* It is suitable to a life of faith, and for perfecting the grace of humility. 2. *It is analogous to our ignorance of nature's mysteries.* We can observe the effects and direction of the wind, but cannot tell "whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." (John iii. 8.) We have no faculty to observe where the wind arises, and where it breathes out its last gasp. In like manner we are ignorant of the mystery of organic life —most notably of human life. Science can do much in classifying facts and reducing them to general laws, but cannot arrive at the ultimate mystery. How our physical nature is developed in the darkness of the silent womb, and prepared for the light and work of life, is still inexplicable to us. If we are ignorant of what is so intimately connected with ourselves, how can we presume to know all the work that God is doing in the world? Let us stand in awe and reverence before the depths of Divine knowledge, which conceal so much from our most piercing sight. Enough for man to know, that there is duty to be done, there are safe principles to act upon, and all faithful workers are sure of reward.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES

Verse 1. Suppose that you are in the South Sea Isles, where the bread-fruit grows, and that by chance, or on purpose, you scatter some of its precious bunches on the sea. At the moment you may feel that they are lost; but, should the winds and waters waft them to one of those reef islands with which such seas are thickly studded, the wandering seeds may get washed ashore, and beneath those brilliant suns may quickly grow to a

bread-fruit forest. And should some disaster long years after wreck you on that reef, when these trees are grown and their clusters ripe, you may owe your sustenance to the bread which you cast on the waters long ago. Such is God's husbandry. Do the right deed. Do it in faith, and in prayer commend it to the care of God. And though the waves of circumstance may soon waft it beyond your ken, they only carry it to the place prepared by Him. And whether on an earthly or heavenly shore, the result will be found, and the reaper will rejoice that he once was a sower [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

In the eyes of mere economists and calculators, many deeds of love may seem but a reckless waste, and the hope of any real advantage or fruit of them a vain presumption. But the same God who gives to the good man the impulse of duty also gives him his faith. Thus he learns to work beyond the warrant of appearances, and to leave his reward with God.

The seeds of goodness, scattered by a loving hand in the most unpropitious circumstances, may yet become the life of many.

In the course of history, the corruptions of the Church have grown so great that the times required bold men who would venture to cast their seeds of truth upon the waters that, to common eyes, only seemed to give them sepulchre. An ocean of prejudices, prescriptive authority, venerable fictions, and worldly interests, was ready to swallow up their truth. But the seeds they sowed found nourishment and the favour of heaven; they have ripened into successive harvests, and have become the life and rejoicing of many.

The ingratitude of men may seem unprofitably to engulf the labours of love, yet those labours cannot entirely fail of reward. The least possible result is, that they return with blessing into the bosom of the doer.

Verse 2. Miss no opportunity of performing kind actions. Though you should have bestowed your bounty on seven—on a number which you might deem sufficient—should an eighth present himself, do something for him also, for you know not what evil shall be upon earth. You know not in this world of mutation how soon you may be the pensioner instead of the almoner. You know not how soon you may be glad of a crust from those who are at present thankful for your crumbs. Beneficence is the best insurance [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

We are not in danger of erring on the side of large bounty. Our natural selfishness inclines us rather to keep within the mark than to go beyond it.

The best use we can make of the talents committed to us is by their means to secure friends.

In the time of our prosperity we may not perceive what stores of love our kindness has caused to be laid up for us. It needs the occasion of our calamity to unlock them.

We can store up mechanical energy, so that it remains quiescent till such time as we have need of it for effective work. In like manner we can store up for ourselves the energy of love in the hearts of men, and in the day of our distress it will become a power to bless and save.

In what opposite ways may the same consideration be applied? The very circumstance which Solomon here urges as a reason for present and generous liberality, the covetous worldly-minded man pleads as an apology for *hoarding*. I know not, he says, "what evil may come upon the earth." I must, therefore, take good care of what I have got. Who can tell but I may otherwise come to dependence, and die poor myself? A prudent precaution to prevent our becoming a burden upon others in the time of age and infirmity, is by no means to be condemned. But it is an awful perversion, when the apprehension of future possibilities is made an excuse for griping avarice. How much more noble the use that is made, by the spirit of God, of our ignorance of the future! Instead of withholding from others on this ground, says Solo-

mon, rather give while you have to give, and give liberally: lose not the precious opportunity; "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Enjoy, then, the pleasure of present beneficence [*Wardlaw*].

Verse 3. As the clouds are formed, not as an end, in themselves, but that they may water the earth, so God bestows His bounties upon men that they may bless others.

The good heart owns no necessity but that of its own loving nature.

A cloud full of rain, and yet leaving the earth beneath it parched and desolate, would be an anomaly in the natural world; and is not a griping, narrow-souled, selfish rich man an anomaly of the same kind? God has given him the means of making "his very paths drop fatness." . . . In what manifest opposition, then, to the ways and to the will of God does such a man live, when no drop of this plenteous rain is emptied upon the thirsty earth! when he lives only to hoard and heap up his accumulating treasures; or to lay them out only for the gratification of his own vanity and ambition, or of his sensual ease and pleasure? Such a man is a kind of monstrosity in the moral world—fit to be the object of no other feelings than those of contempt and pity on the part of his fellows; and certain to inherit the displeasure and wrath of Him, whose tender mercies are over all His works [*Buchanan*].

Our bounty can never be entirely lost. If we do good in all directions, we shall find the reward of it in some direction, though not, perhaps, where we had most looked for it.

Though there be discretion required in charity to know the worth of the persons on whom it is bestowed (Psa. cxii. 5), yet where the intention of the giver is honest, and endeavours to discern what manner of persons they are to whom he gives, though he may be mistaken, and let his charity fall upon the worst, his reward shall be no less than if it fell upon the better sort; for thus also may this similitude be turned into an argument for charity, as holding forth the certainty of the reward thereof, whether the objects of it be good or bad [*Nisbet*].

Verse 4. It is easy to find excuses for the neglect of our duty.

Timidity is a source of moral weakness. Trembling caution can accomplish very little. There is a dauntlessness about faith which does not wait till all is most favourable.

If we are never to do an act of kindness till we are perfectly sure that it will not be abused, and that it will really and fully accomplish the purpose we intend by it, we shall never perform any such act at all. If I am never to give an alms until I know the whole history, past and future, of the individual who is to receive; if I am never to befriend one who is in difficulty and distress till I can be positively assured that he will prove himself worthy of it; if I am never to bestow my money on any undertaking for promoting the temporal or spiritual welfare of my fellow-men till I have infallible proof that there shall be no mistake committed in the management of it, and that it shall effect all the good which its authors are looking for and aiming at, I may as well resolve at once to do nothing in the way of spending my worldly substance for the interests of religion or humanity at all [*Buchanan*].

Certainty is not attainable in the business of common life, therefore men are content to act upon probabilities. Why should they require more in moral duties?

The great preachers of the Gospel have had the courage to sow the seed of the Word when the temper of the time seemed altogether unfavourable. They did not wait till all were willing hearers.

Verse 5. The way of the human spirit from the Creator's power to the consciousness of life, thought, and feeling, and the manner of its strange union with this material frame, are mysteries of which human knowledge can give no perfect account. We can

no more determine the ultimate facts of it than we can distinctly mark the place of the rising and expiring of the viewless wind.

The old mystery of life, which has puzzled the thoughtful in all ages, still returns. God retains the secret as a standing challenge to man.

Throughout all the seeming nature there remains this mysterious, generative, life-giving process in the vegetable, the animal, and especially in the human birth, as a constant symbol of the supernatural presence, or of the old unspent creative force, still having its witness in continually recurring acts, ever testifying to the great Divine secret that baffles science, and to the explanation of which she cannot even make an approach [*Dr. T. Lewis, in Lange*].

Let us apply ourselves to the duty lying near us, and for the assurance of reward and success be content to know that there is an invisible power, accomplishing in secret and in darkness the will of heaven.

Our spirits might well faint amidst all the discouragements of duty, were we not assured that *somewhere* there is perfect knowledge and never-failing power. This is the stable centre of the soul.

Verse 6. We cannot calculate beforehand the success, in special instances, of our labours to do good. The result will, doubtless, show that there has been *some* waste of power. But this should not discourage us.

We may be tempted to try nothing by the morbid apprehension of failure. The better course is to calculate on some of our attempts failing; and on this account, that we may have the greater probability of succeeding in some, to make them the more numerous; whilst, at the same time, we bring to bear upon every one of them the entire amount of prudence and forethought we possess, that, as far as lieth in us, we may ensure a favourable issue to them all [*Wardlaw*].

For sowing—for doing well, every time serveth; and who knoweth which shall do best in the acceptance of God, and in the advancing of our blessedness? Be, therefore, diligent and sow continually. It is not in sowing as it is in buying and selling; in those, things are done by weight and by measure; but in sowing, there is a scattering abroad in a free and full manner. Wherefore, when it is said of the righteous man, "He hath dispensed, he hath given to the poor," Theodoret noteth upon it, "He imitateth those that sow their seed abundantly, scattering it about in hope of filling their hands again" [*Jermin*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—10.

The Counsels of Wisdom to the Children of Pleasure.

Wisdom commends the rational and sober use of pleasure. But when pleasure is pursued for its own sake, leads to forgetfulness of God, or weakens the power of moral control, it becomes an evil. But even those who are most careful herein have need constantly to keep before them certain solemn truths. I. To Remember how Empty the Most Favoured Life is of any Solid Good. The wise man is ready to admit all the good that life contains. He does not, in the spirit of a gloomy philosophy, condemn all enjoyment, 1. *The consciousness of existence is itself a pleasure.* (Verse 7.) Light speaks to us of all that is glad, joyous, and free; and light is the symbol of life. Existence is an inheritance, and we fondly cling to it, even when bereft of all else. To enjoy the light of the sun and the comfort of the elements is, in itself, pure delight. 2. *Some lives may have a large capacity for pleasure.* This may be favoured *by the length of life.* A man may live "many years, and rejoice in them all." Time is, at least, one dimension of the capacity of life; and if it be extended in other dimensions by

the ability to enjoy and improve it, life may be filled with much good. Or, take life *in the season of its greatest power of enjoyment.* (Verse 9.) Youth is the time of the greatest vigour, when the sense of enjoyment is keenest. Care has not yet begun to corrode the mind, nor faith in man to lessen, nor hope to lose her charms. The young man may well "rejoice" in his "youth." 3. *A life devoted entirely to pleasure, however favoured, has no solid worth.* He who lives to satisfy his appetites, unmindful of the claims of duty and of his solemn reckoning with God, will find at the close of life that he has been grasping a shadow. The pleasing forms die in his embrace, like those of a dream when one awaketh. If a man has anything to dread from the judgment, life, however blessed by outward favours, must be but a sad portion after all. But, taking man at his best estate here, and comparing it with the sublimer destinies awaiting him in future worlds, it will be found that the successive stages of life are vanity. The rosy dawn and the bright morning of life may be beautiful, but they hold their perfection only for a little moment. The day, meanwhile, hastens on to its close, and a night of uncertain duration shuts up the scene. The contemplation of life must produce a despairing sadness, unless a man has the hope of immortality. This hope shifts the centre of the soul from the region where all is unsubstantial and vain, and places it where all is real and abiding. This idea raises and transforms life. Without it, life will be found to be empty of any enduring worth. II. To Consider the Dread Abode to which They are Hastening. (Verse 8.) The Old Testament speaks in very gloomy language of that dark house where souls are detained after death. The darkness that rested upon life and immortality could not be cleared away until His coming who was the life and light of men. Yet even the advanced light of the Gospel does not completely relieve the gloom with which this dread subject afflicts and oppresses the human mind. Departed saints have still, in some form, to submit to the long reign of death. Still, "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body," they groan for perfection and full investiture. With all the superior light and hope of the Gospel, the subject is yet sufficiently solemn. There are views of the state of the dead upon which it is salutary that we should dwell, even while we cherish the brightest hope of reward. This tends to preserve that humility which is proper to our present condition, and to set the pleasures of the world in their true light. The following thoughts arise whenever we contemplate the state of the dead: 1. *There is the sense of obscurity and neglect.* A man is removed from the eyes of the living, and though his memory is preserved awhile, he is, at length, forgotten. There is an idea of utter neglect. It seems as if the invisible thread of love and memory, which connects the two worlds, becomes at last severed. With all the dear human hopes and feelings that now fill us, we cannot contemplate such a fate without due solemnity. 2. *There is the sense of uncertainty.* Whenever we think of what is beyond our knowledge, and especially of that in which we ourselves must play an important part, vague fears arise in the mind. With our present experience, we are not able to conceive of the manner in which they live who have put off this vesture of mortality. And this very uncertainty becomes an oppression. This is, indeed, relieved by faith; yet despite of all, it will now and then suggest itself to contemplation. 3. *There is the sense of privation.* There must be such, as far as this life is concerned. When we have passed the bounds of time and space, the pleasures of this world exist for us no more. We seem half afraid that even *there* we shall lack many enjoyments. Thus, in certain moods of mind, must we think of that long night which succeeds our mortal day. Though such thoughts should not be the governing ideas of our spiritual life, yet they are valuable for several purposes of discipline. They impart that soberness to the mind, by which we learn to taste the pleasures of life as those who have shortly to enter upon a scene of unknown and untried things. To every one, the wise man says, "let him remember the days of darkness: for they shall be many."

III. To be Mindful of the Solemn Judgment Awaiting Mankind. (Verse 9.) This does not refer to any penalties of sin in the present life, though these are Divine Judgments, but rather to that solemn reckoning which God will make with all mankind. The fact of human responsibility makes a future Judgment necessary. Mankind will not be judged in masses, but each one by himself. "God will bring *thee* into judgment." 1. *The moral worth or worthlessness of each human life will be estimated.* The true character of each man will be revealed. The Judgment is spoken of as that which shall make *manifest* what we really are. (2 Cor. v. 10.) 2. *The judgment will be against all lives in which there has been a non-recognition of God.* The youth is reminded that for the joy which is so natural to his season of life, for walking in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes, God will bring him into judgment. This does not necessarily mean condemnation. He who in life's work or pleasures recognises God, and is governed by spiritual ideas, though he may feel solemn as he thinks of the test to which he shall be brought, has yet nothing to fear. It will be a test discovering what he is, not one which destroys. Like gold which is proved in the fire, the Judgment will, indeed, be a *trial* for all the righteous, but it will not be destruction. But he who in his pleasures and works has forgotten God, has lived without a due sense of responsibility, and of the awful future, has all to fear from the Holy One, who is determined to put all sin out of His sight. Nothing that is evil can live in the light of His countenance, and all is sad and unprofitable upon which that light does not shine. Human life in all its duties, joys, and sorrows, is sanctified and raised by the continual desire to please God. Without this the whole of life comes under condemnation.

IV. To Allow these Facts Practically to Influence the Conduct. (Verse 10.) In this section the wise man dwells upon the chief facts of probation and destiny. No stage of life is permanent, but all is fleeting. All are hastening to that long dark night in which no man can work. All alike await the Judgment, even the best and holiest needing to find mercy of the Lord in that day. What course of conduct is the wisest in the face of these solemn truths? How, especially, is the youth, to whom the world offers the strongest temptations, so to order his life, lest he should come into the condemnation of the Judgment? 1. *He should remove the causes of inward trouble.* "Remove sorrow from thy heart." Sin, in its many forms, is the cause of all trouble and sorrow. All disorders in the universe arise from this one bitter root. If sin is put away, though a man may have outward trouble, yet the depths of him will be lightened up with the presence of God; and in a rich hope, and an approving conscience, he will have the comfort of an unearthly joy. The youth who follows his desires, without any moral restraint, must sooner or later know sad grief heavy at his heart. Conscience will one day awake and afflict his soul. 2. *He should avoid the physical penalties of sin.* There are spiritual sins for which the flesh is not chastised. There are carnal sins whose penalties man is made to bear in his body. Some vices injure health, exhaust physical vigour, and bring acute misery. "Put away evil from thy flesh" is the counsel of wisdom to those who are tempted to try dangerous pleasures. A man may well reflect whether he does not pay too high a price for the sinful indulgence of the flesh. These natural chastisements foredate the Last Judgment, and full retribution for all sin. Their lessons should be early learned, lest youth should transmit to age the inheritance of suffering and shame. To put away evil from the heart, and sorrow from the flesh, is to garnish and prepare the soul, that heavenly influences there may take up their abode. The joy of opening life is a hollow vanity, unless a man has learned to cherish those joys which time can never fade.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 7. All light is pleasant; 'tis the very smile of nature. the gloss of the world, the varnish of the creation, a bright paraphrase upon bodies. Whether it discover itself in the modesty of a morning blush, and open its fair and virgin eyelids in the dawning of the day; or whether it dart out more vigorous and sprightful beams, shining out in its noonday glory; whether it sport and twinkle in a star; or blaze and glare out in a comet; or frisk and dance in a jewel; or dissemble and play the hypocrite in a glow-worm; or epitomize and abbreviate itself in a spark, and show its zeal in the ruddiness of its complexion in the yolk of the fire; or grow more pale, pining, or consuming away in a candle. However it is pleased to manifest itself, it carries a commanding lustre in its face. . . . Is it not a pleasant thing to behold a sun? nay, to behold but a candle, a deputed light, a vicarious light—the ape of a sunbeam? [*Culverwell.*]

Light is the emblem of all that is joyous in life. Sorrow and melancholy seek the shade and the darkness.

It is only the brightest passages, the best moments of life, that can be aptly and truly represented by the light. Sin has disturbed the harmony between the natural and the spiritual worlds.

Verse 8. If a man's life is not approved of God, prosperity, however long continued, will end in the darkening of all that is hopeful and bright in life. This is but the prelude of a sadder privation beyond life.

The most favourable instances of the worldly prosperity of godless men do not affect the truth, that all that cometh of such a life is vanity.

In the years of thy life, therefore, remember these days. In thy days of delight, remember these days of trouble, and let the remembrance of them make thee to provide against them by well ordering thy life [*Jermin*].

As long as life is *coming*, or *to come*, its vanity does not appear. On the contrary, there is nothing thought of then but content and satisfaction; nothing but Elysian prospects, dreams of happiness, and landscapes of Paradise. For there is a strange fallacy in Hereafter; and distance, which lessens objects to the eye, magnifies them to the mind. We are big with the hopes of that part of life which is coming on, and live day after day upon the fancy of what to-morrow will produce, like the spectators of a play still in expectation of the next scene; but yet, when to-morrow comes, we find it just like yesterday, vain and without content; and so will every *to-morrow* be when it comes to be *to-day* [*Norris*].

There are days of darkness which will come to the just, in this world · but it is not a darkness which hides God. Rather is it like that of night, which uncovers the celestial globe, and reveals bright glories in the heavens which were never seen by day.

Verse 9. When the heart is in a right state no joy will harm, provided only it be true joy, and not merely a corrupting mirth. Enjoy it, then, if there is anything pleasant for the sight or hearing. provided you sin not against God [*Luther*].

To walk in the ways of the heart and in the sight of the eyes may be taken in a bad sense, as representing that wilfulness in conduct which does not acknowledge God. But there is a proper use both of the heart and of the eye. God denies no lawful pleasures to that faculty which loves, or to that which appreciates the forms of beauty in the world. The principle by which life is governed is the chief thing. To the pure, all these things are pure.

The stronger the temptations to unlawful pleasures, the stronger should be felt the restraints of religion.

In the enjoyments of pleasure, a man

should have the thought ever present with him that he is living under the shadow of the Day of Judgment—a shadow which is deepening fast. This will prevent him from abusing that which was intended for his training and improvement.

To be brought face to face, at last, with God will of itself be terrible distress to all who have not learned in life to find their chief delight in Him.

Verse 10. There are inward and outward troubles—sources of pain to the body and to the mind. From some of these our goodness cannot deliver us; but from the worst forms of them we can be saved by obedience to the will of God.

That heart which God's Spirit has renewed and occupies, however oppressed with the troubles of life, can have no essential and crushing sorrow.

He who is saved from sin is saved from the cause of the deepest troubles. He possesses the true life, and therefore enjoys the gladness which it brings. He becomes a partaker of the Divine nature, and is blessed.

Godliness, while it raises and purifies the spirit of man, does also redeem the flesh from many evils. Herein is a prophecy of a more complete redemption for the body. The tree of life in Paradise heals all the ills of man.

Let, therefore, the youthful worldling pause. Let him not suffer his fond hopes, and dazzling visions of the future, to deceive him, "for childhood and youth are vanity." The promises they make to the thoughtless, carnal mind, are false. The halo which they throw around the world is a deceitful glare. The joyous anticipations in which they indulge are continually liable to disappointment; and every day, every hour, events may arrive that will sweep them utterly away, or bury them in darkness and death [*Buchanan*].

CHAPTER XII.

CRITICAL NOTES.—**1. Thy Creator.**] The Hebrew word is in the plural form, denoting the fulness and wealth of the Divine nature. While the evil days come not.] The time of joyless old age as contrasted with the glad season of youth. **2. While the sun, or the light, or the stars be not darkened.**] The separate mention of the sun and light is not to be considered as tautology. Aben Ezra explains that by the light is signified the morning light, which, though identical with that proceeding from the sun, is yet poetically different. The darkening of these natural lights signifies the diminishing of joy and the coming of the season of adversity. (Isa. xiii. 10, Amos viii. 9, Ezek. xxxii. 7.) Nor the clouds return after the rain.] A description of what often happens, in those countries, during the rainy season of winter. After a great discharge of rain, the clouds gather again, the signal for another storm. One trouble follows closely upon another. **3. The keepers of the house shall tremble.**] The human body, being the habitation of the soul, is often compared to a house or tent. (Job. iv. 19, Wisdom ix. 15, Isa. xxxviii. 12, 2 Cor. v. 1, 2 Pet. i. 13.) The description given here is that of a rich mansion or castle, not that of an ordinary house. It is a house having the necessary things of war and luxury; soldiers to defend it and keep watch on the turrets; servants for attendance, and to prepare food for a large household. The furniture and surroundings are those of a magnificent and lordly dwelling—the hanging lamps, the golden bowl, the splendid fountain. (Verse 6.) By "the keepers of the house" are signified the arms, one of whose chief uses is defence. In old age they become weak and tremulous. And the strong men shall bow themselves.] These are the legs which, from failing strength, bend under the weight of years. And the grinders cease because they are few.] The "millers" or "grinders" are the teeth, which in old age become few. They cease, in the sense of failing in ability to perform their proper function In Hebrew, the form of the word is feminine, in allusion to the custom by which the grinding for the household was performed by female slaves. And those that look out of the windows be darkened.] Not ordinary windows, but some opening in a lofty part, such as a turret. The castle, which would have its "strong men," would also have its watchers on the heights. These answer to the eyes, which are placed aloft as on a watch-tower. Dimness of sight is the common infirmity of old age. **4. And the doors shall be shut in the**

streets.] Some expositors say that by "the doors" the mouth is intended. But this is scarcely likely, as the mouth had been sufficiently described before. The description answers better to the ears, for a double organ is plainly signified, and one by which we hold intercourse with the outer world. When the sound of the grinding is low.] This refers not to the failure of the powers of mastication, but to the failure of hearing. The old man but feebly hears the most familiar household sounds, such as those of the maids grinding corn. And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird.] In allusion, probably, to the sleeplessness of old men. 5. Afraid of that which is high.] Referring to the difficulty which an old man feels in ascending a hill. Fears shall be in the way.] The smallest dangers are magnified by his weakness till they become formidable. The almond tree shall flourish.] The almond tree flourishes in the midst of winter, and bears its blossoms on a leafless stem. These blossoms, notwithstanding their red colour, have, as they fall, the appearance of white snow-flakes. Dry, bleak, barren old age, with its silvery hair, is thus represented. The grasshopper shall be a burden.] Some explain this of their singing and chirping, which may easily annoy the old man. Others—taking the word in the strictly literal sense of *locust*—say that the reference is to these as an article of food which is too strong for the impaired digestion of the aged. Others, again, say that they represent that which devours, hereby signifying those forces which are hostile to life. Various other interpretations are given, more or less fanciful, but all are foreign to the simplicity of the figure. Here, it will be found that the meaning that would occur to the simplest reader is the best. The old man cannot bear the least weight. Desire shall fail.] Every kind of desire, whether it be the appetite for food, or that of the sensual passions. Because man goeth to his long home.] Lit. "to his eternal house." This is inserted parenthetically—all these things are signs that life is shortly about to cease. The expression is found in Tobit iii. 6, and was familiar to Roman literature. As the word rendered "eternal" also signifies *the world*, it may be that the idea of time is not prominent here, and that we have but a form of the phrase "the other world." 6. Or ever the silver cord be loosed.] Man's living organism is here described by a new figure. It is now a golden lamp, hanging by a silver cord. Hereby is signified the thread of life, and that life is a noble and precious thing. Or the golden bowl be broken.] The vessel containing the oil which supports the flame. This answers to the brain, the organ of the noblest functions of man, and also the source of that stimulus by which all the processes of the body are carried on. Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain.] This gives a different idea from the golden bowl, and evidently refers to that organ which draws nourishment from something outside the body. Like the broken pitcher, the lungs are no longer able to draw in the vital air. Or the wheel broken at the cistern.] The same figure as the last, but representing a different part of the arrangement for drawing water—the cistern wheel for raising and lowering the bucket. Life is represented under the image of a wheel in constant motion. This, probably, suggested James iii. 6, "The wheel of nature." 8. Vanity of vanities.] This repetition of chapter i. 2 shows that these words are intended to be placed at the head of the conclusion of the book. They introduce the epilogue. 10. Acceptable words.] Pleasant, agreeable words. We are reminded of the "gracious words" of Our Lord. (Luke iv. 22.) And that which was written was upright.] In accordance with the standard. They corresponded with eternal realities, and were, therefore, true. 11. The words of the wise are as goads.] The author thus classes himself with the writers of proverbial wisdom. The Sapiential Books of the O. T. would come under this description. Such words are "as goads;" they have the power of penetrating deeply into the heart. And nails.] Used synonymously with "goads." Fastened by the masters of assemblies.] The maxims of wisdom, as united into one assembly or collection. Which are given from one shepherd.] In the sense of a leader of a congregation, or chief of a school. The wisdom of many is pervaded by a spirit of unity. Hengstenberg considers that there is a reference to God as the author of the Sacred Books. 12. My Son.] An expression appropriate to the master of wisdom when addressing his pupils; equivalent to "my scholar," or "dear reader." (Prov. i. 8.) Of making many books there is no end.] The plural form sometimes denotes the parts of one treatise, and conveys the general idea of "much writing." The word may be, therefore, rendered collectively, "in making a great book there is no end." Great labour for little result. These words may also be understood of the heathen literature, which on many subjects was misleading, and really settled no question. 13. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.] There is an implied reference to verse 12. Here the wise man concludes, since it is useless to make a long book. Fear God.] Lit. "God fear." The object of fear is put first for the sake of emphasis. For this is the whole duty of man.] "The whole of man." His destiny depends on this. "For that belongs to all men." *Luther.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—*Verses* 1—7.

Incitements to Early Piety.

The Royal Preacher now leaves speculation, as leading to no substantial result, and turns, with better hopes, to practical matters. He had observed much of this scene of man, and thought deeply upon the mysteries of life and destiny; but he has no brilliant discovery of ultimate wisdom to announce which could settle these questions. He is more inclined to give those few and simple counsels which are far more profitable for himself and for all who hear him. A man always returns gratefully to these when he has grown tired of the conflict of thought and controversy. Thus the Epistles of "Paul the Aged" deal more with the "faithful sayings" than with the deep things of doctrine. Experience teaches a man to rely only upon what is sure. As a master in the school of heavenly wisdom, Solomon calls his young friends around him, exhorting and entreating them to early piety. He lays before them those motives and reasons which commend the fear of God to youth. I. It is a Rational Duty. (Verse 1.) The whole of what we understand by piety is made to consist of the remembrance of our Creator. Nor is this too narrow a basis: it really includes all duty. The fact that God is our Creator is the foundation fact upon which lies all what we know and feel, or are capable of. Practically, to recognise our relationship to God herein is the sum of all duty. If God is our Creator, He will make provision for our sustenance, for our preservation, for our spiritual education and improvement. After the reflection, "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me," how natural is the prayer, "give me understanding that I may learn thy commandments." (Psa. cxix. 73.) To remember God is to keep Him always before us, to be mindful of what He is, to obey His will, and to pay Him thanks. It is like the son's remembrance of his father's home, bringing back tender associations fresh to his mind, acting as a restraint from evil ways, and strengthening the motives of filial duty. God as our Creator has certain rights which we must acknowledge. The only rational service for man is to do what is right in accordance with the relations in which he is placed. This makes early piety the only consistent and reasonable course. All late coming to the knowledge of a God is a culpable forgetfulness. Though the mercy of God be not hereby overtasked, there is in this tardy recognition of duty something ungracious. 1. *God has a right to our entire and life-long service.* The obligation to the loving service of our Creator never ceases for a moment, but always remains with us. Why should we either heedlessly thrust that obligation aside, or keep it in abeyance until we are sated with the world's pleasures, and fondly hope to return to it as a last resource when all else has failed? The service of God should fill the whole area of duty, and the whole course of our time. The true and complete model of the religious life—God's ideal of humanity—is that which was manifested in Christ, whose whole life was devoted to His "Father's business." In that life there were no violent changes, no painful struggles to recover lost ground; but from the earliest dawn of thought and feeling, duty was accepted, and the communication with Heaven kept open. The perfection of this model should not appal us, for it is our duty to make as near an approach to it as possible. "The measure of Christ" is the limit to which we ought to tend, though that limit stretches so far beyond us. 2. *God has a right to our constant love and gratitude.* His character is such as to demand and win our love. He does not use the instruments of terror to lash us into a tender regard for Himself, but seeks to attract us by His loving kindness. Therefore, our love to Him should be deep, simple, and free, as nature. In O.T. times, the love of such an awful Being would be that of a distant, reverential love, represented by the phrase

(which is there the prevailing element) "the fear of God"—that wholesome dread of offending Him. But in the latter revelation, mediation comes to our help; and in Christ, God is brought closer to our human heart and sympathy. We are drawn "with the cords of a man, with the bands of love." (Hos. xi. 4.) Hence our heart is under the stronger obligation to answer back to God. As we were made in His image, we are capable of these high favours and solemn duties. *Gratitude* is but one of the forms of love. It is love contemplating favours, and grasping the hand that blesses. The energy of the living God still goes forth, working in nature, Providence, and grace. Hence the demand upon our gratitude is constant, and ever will be so while our relations with our Creator last. It is irrational to deprive Him of this service during any part of our lives. 3. *God has a right to be glorified in us.* "The heavens declare the glory of God," because they are obliged to obey those eternal conditions which he has laid upon them. They have no power to resist His will, or to conspire against universal order. But man glorifies God, not as conquered by force, but as submissive to His will. Our nature should act as a mirror to the Divine nature, reflecting His truth, His love, His righteousness. When we shine with that heavenly light, thus falling upon our soul, God is glorified. We return, though somewhat dim and impaired, the graces of His image. God has a right to find in every man an answering mind and heart. To refuse the homage of these is to expose ourselves to the penalty of Divine judgments, by which it is likewise possible for God to be glorified in us. Early piety avoids so disastrous a risk. 4. *It is not a reasonable thing that we should give the mere dregs of our life to God.* It is not grateful conduct towards the Author of our being to drive a close bargain with Him, practically asking the question, How little service can we render consistent with our final safety? This is base ingratitude, sins against every law of love, and lacks that nobility of spirit which is essential to our true dignity. If we put off the service of God till it is late in our day of life, and troubles thicken, and we are cut off from consolations elsewhere, we are but offering to Him a miserable remnant—a wasted heritage—what is blind, halt, and lame. Besides, we cannot be sure that even this shall be possible to us. The most ardent and vigorous youth cannot reckon with certainty upon long life. Hence, if delay shows a will most incorrect to heaven, it is also *dangerous.* The uncertainty of life, as well as the reason of the thing, preaches early piety. **II. It Assuages the Sorrows of Age.** (Verses 2—6.) In youth, the power to taste pleasure is strong. The more complicated evils of life—sorrowful regrets, the sense of loss and failure, dissatisfaction with the world—as yet lie far in the future. But they will come, those "evil days" that yield no pleasure. The joyous light within will grow dim, darkening and rendering cheerless the world without. The summer of life was not quite free from troubles, but these were slight and passing as a summer shower. The clouds quickly opened again, and there was the "clear shining after rain." But it is far otherwise in winter. The storm is gloomier and more sweeping now, and the brief pauses of it are but the preparation for a more merciless deluge of rain, for a louder and more melancholy wailing of the winds. In old age, troubles come apace. Even before this time there are evil days and the light begins to fail. (Verses 1, 2.) The description of old age given here is general, being in certain respects true of all, but the picture is too dark and melancholy to represent the old age of the righteous. The character which the writer had in view is evidently that of a man of the world, who had lived for pleasure, who is now no longer able to enjoy, and who has no consolations within to assuage his sorrows. Such, at least, is the original of the picture; yet it may be considered as aptly describing the main features of old age, as they appear to an ordinary spectator. These infirmities and calamities lead to the outer chambers of death, where man awaits his conflict with the last enemy. 1. *Death approaches the aged with many terrors.*

To the young man whose strength is overwhelmed by violence, death is indeed terrible. But to old age, death seems to come with all the refinements of slow torture. (1.) *There is the failure of those powers which carry out the purposes of human activity.* The arms, those "keepers of the house," so valuable for defence, now begin to tremble, and are powerless against the foe. They were once able to shape the stubborn material around to the mind's purpose and design, but now they have lost their cunning. The legs, which once ministered swiftly to the will, stood firm against assault, imparted the sense of freedom, and gave a man sovereign command over the whole area of his work, now bow themselves for very feebleness. (2.) *The failure of the nobler senses.* The eyes—those windows by which the soul looks upon the outer world—are darkened, for the old man brings to them no longer the power of seeing. The ears—one of the entrances for intelligence, and ways of communication with the world outside—are closed, so that they obstruct the paths of sound. The most familiar sounds are scarcely distinguished, the sweet music of speech at length dies away, and the old man becomes completely shut up within himself. (3.) *The failure of the powers of enjoyment.* The power to taste all pleasures, coarse or refined, now fails. Savoury meats and luscious entertainments now pall upon the sense. Singing men and singing women cease to charm. (4.) *The increased power of little things to annoy.* The grasshopper is now a burden, the slightest obstacle is magnified into an object of dread, and every little hill becomes a mountain of difficulty. Short breath, dim eyes, failing limbs, give man a painful sense that he is vanquished by nature. 2. *The event of death to the aged suggests the most melancholy images to the mind.* It is the destruction of the palace of the soul, with all its appliances for defence and luxury. It is the breaking of the golden lamp of life. It is the fatal arrest of that revolving wheel by which we draw what is to us the water of life. The permanent cessation of motion in physical nature means death. The exact meaning of this is, that the body as an organism ceases to exist. There are other movements set up, even when the body lies still in death. "The dust returns to the earth as it was." Of the earthly side of man's nature, we have here an end. The grave is the goal of all that is mortal. The body goes a progress from dust to dust, from a lowly origin to cold dishonour. 3. *Without spiritual consolations the condition of old age is most lamentable.* The perpetual joy that reigns in the breast of the godly man can mitigate the sorrows of old age. The worst evils become disarmed when we can afford to set them at naught by the consciousness of strong consolation within. When the eye grows dim, and the ear ceases to be charmed by sweet sounds, celestial light shines inward with richer effulgence, and the soul listens to diviner harmonies. With the spiritual man, the power to enjoy God increases as his human strength decays. Godliness even modifies some of the physical conditions of age by saving a man from the penalties of sensuality and vice. He who has learned to preserve the honour of his body by temperance and sobriety of behaviour, when he comes to grey hairs will not be such a deplorable ruin as the sinner who has grown old in sin. Thus early piety assuages the sorrows of age, and raises a joy within the breast which no calamities can dislodge. III. It Deprives of Terror the Soul's Inevitable Appearance before God. (Verse 7.) 1. *To appear before God is the destination of every human soul.* The flesh ends in dust. Man sinks down to that from which he arose. But man is made in the image of God, and therefore in the image of His immortality. There is a part of him that can never die. While the flesh goes down to dust, there is another movement of the spirit upward to God. Each human soul must take that solemn journey to God. However much it may dread the meeting, it cannot pass one side of Him, or in any way avoid Him, but must go straight into His presence. In their "long home"—that other house of life—all men, for good or ill, must await God. 2. *That appearance must bring the ungodly into conflict with the Divine Judg-*

ments. Sin leaves a mark upon the soul that death itself is not able to efface. God "changes man's countenance and sends him away," but the spiritual character of the soul cleaves to it still. Man in that other world must for ever live with himself; and what he is, so shall be his condition. None but the pure and holy can remain in God's sight, and enjoy the comfort of His presence. If a man has not answered the purpose intended by his Creator, he cannot be approved, but must suffer the Divine displeasure. 3. *The godly will come to his Creator in peace.* To be summoned into the presence of God is sufficiently solemn, even for the purest and holiest of mankind. But such will come, not to an offended, but to a reconciled God. The solemn meeting will be peace, and prosperity, and endless refreshment. In the dread passage out of life into eternity, the good man learns to say, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." And when his spirit takes its everlasting flight unto Him who gave it, he shall find that the light which was sown for him springs up into a harvest of blessedness. He who has remembered his Creator in the days of his youth shall be able, in his time of age and decay, to utter with confidence the prayer, "Lord, remember me." Early piety is the only perfectly graceful conduct towards the Author of our being, the most acceptable sacrifice, the best provision against the sorrows of life, and the terrors of the last trial. The soul needs the strongest ground for courage and hope when this present world vanishes, and there is nothing to intercept its vision of the throne of God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 1. Practically considered, the root of all moral evil is forgetfulness of God.

Remembrance imparts to great facts and impressions the beauty and influence of presence. Thus the truth of God's nature and our duty comes upon us with fresh power.

The mention of the Creator, here, shows the right which He has in us, and our obligation.

Your own happiness is concerned in your compliance with this counsel. That happiness is unworthy of the name which is disturbed by the remembrance of God. The contemplation, and enjoyment, and service of the Divine Being, must be the honour and the blessedness of every rational nature. There is a propriety, a beauty, and a glory in early piety [*Wardlaw*].

Of his last years this old man says, "I have no pleasure in them." Once on a time existence was a gladness, and the exuberant spirits overflowed in shouts and songs of hilarious ditties. So abundant was the joy of life, that, like the sunbeams in a tropic clime, it was needful to shade it, and with a Venetian lattice of imagined sorrows and tragic tales, the young man assuaged the over-fervid beams of his own felicity. Now there is no need of such artificial abatements. It is not easy for the old man to get a nook so warm that it will thaw the winter of his veins. To say nothing of a song, it is not easy for him to muster up a smile; and as he listens with languid interest to the news of the day, and, in subtile sympathy with his own failing faculties, as he disparages this modern time and its dwindled men, it is plain that, as for the world, its avocations and amusements, its interests and its inhabitants, he has little pleasure in them [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Verse 2. The conditions of external nature, in their aspect towards ourselves, are determined by our own state. Nature is gay, or sad, or languishing, according to the several moods of our soul. When we lose the power of enjoying it, the world itself may be said to pass away.

As the light declines, the gayest colours of life fade, and, at length, all is reduced to a dreary blank. So it shall be with the youth who vainly

depends upon the continuance of the world's happiness.

He only is preserved from bitter disappointments and long regrets, who seeks that light of heavenly joy which increases while all other lights grow dim.

We should use our mercies and privileges which are common to us with other men, to wit, our bodily sight, our reason, and all other comforts, which may be signified by the lights here mentioned, so as we may be still mindful of the decay and failing of them at death; and often think with ourselves what a comfort it will be to see by faith Him that is invisible favourable to us, to behold Christ the Sun of Righteousness shining in mercy upon us, and to have the Day-Star, His Spirit, arising in our hearts never to set again, even when all other lights and outward comforts will be darkened [*Nisbet*].

In youth, troubles come like rain, which, though inconvenient while it lasts, leaves no devastation behind. But in age, troubles are like rain falling upon a flood already threatening and which, at length, carries away man' into eternity (Psa. xc. 5),

Old age is a Tierra del Fuego—a region where the weather never clears. Once, when a trivial ailment came, the hardy youth could outbrave it, and still go on with his daily duties. But now, every ailment is important, and they are never like to end. The cough is cured only to be succeeded by an asthma, and when the tender eyes have ceased to trickle, the ears begin to tingle. Once upon a time a few drops might fall into the brightest day, like a settling shower in June; and there were apt to be hurricanes, equinoctial gales, great calamities, drenching and devastating sorrows. But now, the day is all one drizzle, and life itself the chief calamity, and there is little space for hope where the weather is all either clouds or rain [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Verse 3. As each power and sense fails, man descends by so many steps into the grave.

By the failure of sight—the noblest of the senses—a man has already entered "the valley of the shadow of death."

In old age, a man is compelled, in a terribly real sense, to retire from the world. Shut in from outward joys, he must live with himself. How cheerless if he has no Divine Comforter!

When old age, with its ever-increasing feebleness, draws on, "the keepers of the house"—the once-powerful arms that shielded the body from every hostile assault, that triumphantly defended it even in the shock of battle—"shall tremble." Their force is gone; they can no longer grasp a weapon, or strike a blow. The "strong men" too, that were like the pillars of the building—the firm and well-jointed limbs that bore the body up, unconscious of its weight—"shall bow themselves," and sink down helpless beneath the load. "And the grinders shall cease because they are few"—the toothless jaws shall at length refuse their office—the very mechanism by which the waste of nature's energies was wont to be repaired, losing its power to act, and thereby accelerating the progress of decay. "And those that look out of the windows"—the sentinels that kept watch in the lofty towers, and whose function it was to descry and announce the approach of danger—those bright and beaming eyes that, erewhile, looked forth far and wide on surrounding things, shall "be darkened"; their range of vision will become contracted, and blind Isaac shall not know his younger from his elder son [*Buchanan*].

In the consciousness of failing strength, the good man feels that he belongs the more to God.

Verse 4. When hearing fails, a man is shut in from more than half the world. Even affection and love can only minister to such by some other and more difficult entrance.

But not only is the door of audience closed, the door of utterance is also shut. "The grinders have ceased," and with lips collapsed and organs all impaired, it is an effort to talk; and bending silently in on his own solitude,

the veteran dozes in his elbow-chair the long summer hours when younger folks are busy. But, if he dozes in the day, he does not sleep at night. At the voice of the bird, at the crowing of the cock, although he does not hear it, he can keep his couch no longer. He rises, but not because he has any work to do, or any pleasure to enjoy [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

Aristotle hath observed it well, that by hearing, the things of others are made known to ourselves, as by our voice and tongue we are able to make known our own things to another. But when old age cometh, the glory of this most excellent work is humbled and "brought low," the anvil is worn, the hammer is weak, the drum is unbraced, the pure air is grown thick, the music is marred, the doleful toll of the passing bell being ready to sound, and to ring out [*Jermin*].

He can afford to part with the delights of music who has learned to make melody in his heart.

Verse 5. He has neither enterprise nor courage. Once it was a treat to press up the mountain side and enjoy the majestic prospect. Now there is no high place which is not formidable; and even to the temple, it is a sad drawback that it stands on Zion, and that it is needful to "go up." "The almond tree flourishes, and the grasshopper is burdensome." Teaze him not with your idle affairs. In that load of infirmities he has enough to carry, and though it be not the weight of a feather, do not augment his burden who totters under the load of many years. For "desire has failed." You can grapple with heavy tasks; you can submit to severe toil and protracted self-denial, for you have a purpose to serve—you have an end in view. But with him there is no inducement, for there is no ulterior [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

The hoary head of old age—the flourishing of the almond tree—forebodes the dreary winter that shuts the scene of mortal life.

In this present state—this earthly house—man is but as a guest that tarrieth for a night; but in that "house of eternity"—that other world—to which he is hastening, man has his final and permanent habitation.

It should be our aim to make preparation for our comfort, peace, and joy, in that world where we shall dwell the longest.

Verse 6. Though death involves the destruction of the entire mortal frame, yet it may begin in any one of the great centres of life—the brain, the heart, or the lungs. The "silver cord" of nervous matter may be "loosed," and the delicate mechanism by which the body is supplied with blood and air may be rendered useless.

Science has thrown much light upon those wonderful processes by which physical life is maintained. But its greatest discoveries are chiefly the clearing, and settling into more definite form, of that knowledge which was held in solution by mankind for ages. Poetry has often anticipated science, and the prophet comes before the investigator.

The fountain of natural life remains for the race, but the individual is only permitted to draw from it for a short time.

The bucket and the wheel are broken; the water can no longer be drawn; and instead of the busy and lively scene that was wont to surround the well's mouth, all is solitude and silence, the ground untrodden, the water stagnant [*Wardlaw*].

Verse 7. However fairly it may be garnished, man lives but in a house of clay whose end is dust.

The humble destination of the mortal part of us should be a rebuke to pride.

Some rationalistic expositors maintain that these words teach that the soul loses its individuality, and is absorbed into God. But we are plainly taught that man, as a spirit, returns to God, not to perish by dispersion in His infinity, but to be judged. (Verse 14.) Hence moral responsibility will remain, and this is not possible unless

the conscious selfhood in each man remains.

Natural likeness to God—for we are spirit as well as flesh—makes us capable of appearing before Him in a spiritual world. But *moral likeness* to Him can alone turn that solemn necessity into blessedness.

We know not what mysterious things await the spirit when it returns to God; but we know that the law of love holds good, as the condition of happiness, in all worlds.

Our spirits are God's free gift, and therefore all the powers and faculties thereof ought to be employed to the honour of the Giver. (Rom. xi. 36.) He is to be depended on, and acknowledged for the preservation of them (Job. x. 12); and all crosses upon body and spirit to be submitted unto. (Heb. xii. 9.) [*Nisbet.*]

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 8—11.

The Vindication of a True Religious Teacher.

The Church, though guided and informed by the Spirit of God, must have human teachers. Human words, written or spoken, are necessary to convey the suggestions of inspiration. Physical nature can be known by observation and research; but we can only know a person when he pleases to reveal himself by speech. God has spoken in past ages to minds fitted to receive and convey His truth. He who affirms that he possesses true spiritual wisdom, and speaks on behalf of God, puts forward a high claim. Upon what grounds can such a claim be vindicated? Solomon here answers this question for himself, and the claims of all true religious teachers admit of the like justification. These claims may be examined as they have reference to the teacher himself, or to his work. He may be vindicated, therefore: I. By the Worth of His personal Qualifications. God has always chosen the purest and the noblest natures to convey His truth to mankind. The men who instruct us in the pages of the Written Word were fit instruments for so high an office; and all who presume to teach the Church the will of God must be sufficiently endowed in mind, and heart, and strength of purpose. Every true spiritual teacher should partake of the qualities which the author of this book claims for himself. 1. *He has the gift of spiritual wisdom* (ver. 9). He is in the possession of truths which lie not idly in his mind, but are quick and powerful, influencing the heart and life. To have wisdom is the one thing needful for the conveyance of it. God must first speak to the soul of a teacher before he can instruct the Church in words of living power. He can teach the people knowledge as long as he continues to utter, not only the old truths, but also the latest things which he has heard from God. This imparts the freshness of the morning to what may be, in reality, as old as time itself. 2. *He has the power and impulse to teach wisdom.* He is not content to be wise for himself; he must teach the people. This requires special talents, and a disposition towards the work. (1) *The power of conveying knowledge in a portable form.* "He gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs." These are compact and terse expressions of truth—fulness and wealth in little compass. It is sometimes an advantage to be able to exchange the scattered and cumbrous possessions of the mind for their golden equivalents of thought. We owe much to those who have expressed the wisdom of many in brief and pointed sayings. (2.) *The power of conveying knowledge in an agreeable form.* "Acceptable words," not of necessity to all, but to the true children of wisdom. There are those who are "of the truth," and who therefore recognise the features of truth as by an unerring instinct. To such the words of wisdom are pleasant, and find welcome entrance and commendation. (3.) *The power of high moral purpose.*

The Royal Preacher had a high moral purpose to urge him to his task. He collected the maxims and chief things of wisdom, not for intellectual display or recreation, but in order that he might awaken in the souls of men the love of truth and the sense of duty. Such a purpose made him thoroughly in earnest. He announced no curious speculations, remote from the true interests of man; but, in words of solemn earnestness, set forth the simple facts of experience and of duty. The religious teacher has the strongest reason for earnestness, because he is concerned with eternal verities which will have untold significance when the world has passed away. All genuine teachers of the Church of God know and feel great spiritual truths, and tell them forth from the abundance of their heart. But further; the true religious teacher is vindicated. II. By the Verification of His Work. He who is endowed with the necessary qualities of mind, and heart, and earnest purpose, must be a successful leader of the thought and effort of God's people. Given such a teacher, and we can predict the results of his work. But we can reverse the process, and from the nature of the work, judge the worth and fitness of the teacher. Thus we are capable of verifying what is submitted to us as truth. We have a stronger foundation than mere authority for the essential facts of our spiritual nature. Even Christ Himself was not above appealing to that standard of truth which is preserved in every pure mind and heart. To all such, His sayings were true. We have, in this section, certain marks by which we can assure ourselves of the truth of what is delivered to us. 1. *The teaching should be conformed to the standard of eternal truth.* "That which was written was upright; even words of truth." In the physical world, there are fixed directions—such as the level and the vertical. In like manner, in the spiritual world, there is a normal and standard of right. Whatever is conformed to this shall live through the ages; and whatever is not so conformed, men will, in the course of time, allow most willingly to die. Conscience, enlightened by the Spirit of God, has a correct eye to discover what is right and true in morals and religion. And whatever offends, that eye cannot be allowed long to endure. 2. *The teaching should have the power of penetrating the heart.* (ver. 11.) Like "goads" and "nails," spiritual truth has the power of penetrating the heart of the children of God, and there fixing itself. Divine Revelation, above all, has this wonderful property. Whatever in the literature of the world is deepest, and touches most our inmost part, is derived from that Blessed Book. All the rest, however beautiful or worthy in itself, does but gild and play upon the surface of our souls. If our hearts are sincere, and open to spiritual impressions, they can thus judge of the claims of any teacher to be the messenger of God's truth. 3. *The teaching should commend itself to the children of wisdom.* It should find a welcome in all sincere and upright souls. Wisdom is sure to be "justified of her children." She speaks those things which they *know* to be true to their own nature, instincts, and longings. 4. *The teaching should be in harmony with all previous truth.* "Which are given from one shepherd." However diversified the utterances of truth by different minds, that truth is at one with itself. The light may be coloured by the medium through which it passes, or broken up into refractions, yet these can be traced to the same pure and single light of heaven. The Bible is an instance of such unity, because, though the work of many authors, it is pervaded by one purpose, and bears the impress of one presiding mind. In the successive stages of revelation, the truth is advanced further, but it is in perfect continuity with all that has preceded. Thus, by these several marks, the work of the true teachers of the Church may be verified, and proved to be really the work of God. Their claim to be heard may be supported upon the surest evidence. Even the Bible itself cannot be regarded as so securely resting upon authority as to set aside the necessity of enquiring into the nature and morality of its doctrines and precepts. Our spiritual nature answers to these, that they are right, pure, and true. Strong as the Scripture is in the

support of external evidence, it is sublimely strong in the witness which it bears to itself. These "words of the wise" can be verified by their conformity to the standard of right, by their power to touch the heart and conscience, and by their adaptation to all the necessities of the soul. The authors are many, but they have contributed to form one book, which conveys a perfect unity of impression to every spiritual mind. It has the characteristic of every true book, and that is, that it has one central idea—one principal theme. That idea is one of surpassing greatness, for it concerns the most important and lasting interests of mankind.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 8. These words are repeated in order to show that all human endeavour and greatness are vain, if the silent dust is all that remains of man.

The hand of death will lift from before the eyes of the dying the veil of delusive fascination that covered the emptiness of earthly joys; and this solemn truth, inscribed upon them all, will appear in its dread reality, and be felt in all its bitterness by the disappointed and foreboding heart [*Wardlaw*].

He who sees the vanity of life, is best prepared to learn the fear of God, and the ways of duty (ver 13).

This is but a half-truth. Human existence cannot be considered as wholly vain when it is regarded in the light of the hereafter.

Verse 9. All who possess true wisdom have necessity laid upon them to teach it. The wisest cannot communicate his wisdom by some sudden influence. He must take upon himself the humble duty of teaching.

The knowledge of Divine things is the only stable foundation for piety. If the feelings are not fed from hence, they do but waste and consume the energy of the soul.

Instead of hiding in his own breast those treasures of wisdom and knowledge he had acquired—instead of treating them as a mere intellectual luxury, or of selfishly hoarding them up for his own behoof—he was at pains to turn them to account, in the way of promoting the great interests of morality and religion. . . . . This was not a subject on which to speak at random. It demanded something better than hasty and superficial thoughts. He laid himself out, accordingly, to discover, by profound meditation, by practical and persevering study, the best and most appropriate things that could be said; and to condense and adjust them into those terse and pointed sentences which are usually designated by the name of proverbs [*Buchanan*].

The reason of things lies in little compass, if the mind could at any time be so happy as to light upon it. All philosophy is reduced to a few principles, and those principles comprised in a few propositions. And as the whole structure of speculation rests upon three or four axioms, or maxims, so that of practice also bears upon a very small number of rules. And surely there was never yet any rule or maxim that filled a volume, or took up a week's time to be got by heart. The truth is, there could be no such thing as art or science, could not the mind of man gather the general natures of things out of the numberless heaps of particulars, and then bind them up into such short aphorisms or propositions, so that they may be made portable to the memory, and therefore become ready and at hand for the judgment to apply, and make use of, as there shall be occasion [*South*].

Verse 10. The truth may often be unpalatable, but it should not be so expressed as to give offence to those who hear it. The most harsh truths

can always be so combined with others as to produce a grateful impression. In the doctrines of grace, and mercy, and hope for man, the true teacher of the Church has abundant material for imparting sweetness to his message.

Every faithful instructor of God's people maintains a strict regard for truth, while he seeks, on the other hand, to make it lovely in the eyes of mankind.

The guidance of inspiration did not render unnecessary the activity of genius in the writers of the Sacred Books. They were able to clothe the truth in forms of beauty, and with all the agreeable diversity of their several gifts.

There were two objects at which he especially aimed—the one, to set down only that which was upright, even words of truth; the other, to find acceptable words in which to convey his thoughts. He knew how often the most weighty and precious lessons were rendered utterly distasteful, and even offensive, by the unsuitable language in which they were expressed. . . . He understood human nature. He knew that many will be led who will not be driven; that it is often very possible to conciliate where it would be hopeless to attempt to coerce; that rudeness seldom fails to aggravate and embitter the enmity and opposition which gentleness would soothe and sweeten—nay, that so apparently a small matter as mere style—the propriety, the elegance, the felicity of the form of speech in which a truth is delivered—will, with many minds, gain for it a place and power which, in their case at least, it would never otherwise have acquired [*Buchanan*].

Writing gives a permanence to truth, and preserves it from the wrongs of time. It makes the progress of humanity possible by securing the results of all past victories over ignorance.

We owe much to the gifted men who have made great truths permanent for us in forms of beauty. They prepare and spread the repasts of the mind and soul.

Speaking is but like a burning coal, which giveth heat and some light near at hand; but writing is like a shining lamp, which giveth light afar off [*Jermin*].

Verse 11. All true words of lasting significance to man have power to enter the depths of the soul and to fasten themselves there.

As the Bible dwells upon the subject of all human anxieties, and speaks in the language of human experience and sympathy, its words have a pre-eminent power in piercing the heart.

The power of a book depends, not entirely upon its own worth, but also upon the condition of the reader. There are states of mind and heart in which the words of the Bible come home to us with overwhelming power.

St. Cyprian, therefore, saith: take not those things which are eloquent, and serve to delight the ears, but those that are strong and powerful to work upon the heart, to wound and gall the conscience, to rouse a carnal security. Such goads were the words of St. Peter, when they that heard them were pricked in their hearts, and cried out to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Of these goads, that is true, which from heaven was spoken to Saul, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" [*Jermin*].

How often has it thus happened that some single sentence of Scripture—heard, perhaps, in some sermon, or read in some book, of which nothing else whatever is remembered—has been so fixed, in a moment, in the sinner's mind that he could not get rid of it? He tried to forget it; he wandered, it may be, all over the world, in the hope and with the desire of being able to free himself from the disquietude it created; but the nail could not be drawn out [*Buchanan*].

The words of the wise, who have spoken true things concerning the deepest interests of man, though they are many and diversified, are pervaded by a spirit of unity. They

are but separate beams of one central light.

The "shepherds" who have taught the Church by their words contained in the Scripture, though they lived in different ages, and belonged to widely diverse classes of society, have produced a volume which, in the highest sense, is one Book. It is one, not by an outward, but by an organic, unity. One living power fills and informs every part.

But this unity of Scripture, where is it? From what point shall we behold and recognize it? Surely from that in which those verses (Eph. i. 9, 10) will place us, when we regard it as the story of the knitting anew the broken relations between the Lord God and the race of man; of the bringing the First-begotten into the world, for the gathering together all the scattered and the sundered in Him; when we regard it as the true *Paradise Regained*—the true *De Civitate Dei*—even by a better title than those noble books which bear these names—the record of that mystery of God's will which was working from the first to the end "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ [*Trench*].

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12—14.

Parting Counsels.

We have here the parting counsels of one whose native ability, careful culture, long and varied experience, and spiritual wisdom, gave him the right to claim a hearing for his weighty words. He does not speak as a young and untried man, who, lacking experience, is yet able to reason from principles, and therefore gives advice with little hesitation. His counsels are not a brilliant intellectual effort, forcing attention upon itself; they arise rather from a heart which had endured the pain of conflict with temptation, doubt, and failure. The language is that of affectionate entreaty, and is concerned with those few and simple truths which age bequeaths to youth as the only heritage of any enduring value. The wisest man, when he draws near to the end of life, has little else to say than to commend old and familiar truths. Therefore, the Royal Preacher dwells upon the folly of useless struggles after the unattainable—the claims of duty—and the solemnities of the Judgment. I. Leave Fruitless Speculation. (Verse 12.) The statements of this Book touch many mysteries, in whose mazes the mind might easily be lost; but their chief use is to admonish the reader against the actual evils of life, and to stir him up to duty. Those speculations which only minister to curiosity are regarded as possessing two fatal disadvantages. 1. *They do not reach a final settlement of any question.* "Of making many books there is no end." Literature is a necessity of every civilized nation. It preserves the best thoughts and sentiments of their wisest men, and is the very soul of that society in which it was produced. As long as there is mental activity among a people, their literature must be ever growing. Each age, also, claims and requires a different representation of truth, for the simple reason that it is different, in several respects, from every former age. Thus the making of many books cannot come to an end, for the mental activity of mankind must continue. But, in another sense, books do not come to an end. Many of them deal in curious speculations regarding the nature, state, and destiny of man. However confident their authors may have been in the certainty of their conclusions, or however numerous the readers who have yielded their assent, the eternal questioning comes up again and again, and nothing is settled. The old mysteries are inquired into by successive ages of thinkers. They are viewed from every side, and set in various lights of argument and illustration; yet still mankind are as far as ever from their perfect solution. It is true that the Bible admits these mysteries; yet the Bible shows where the

mind of man may rest in safety and peace, and what is the proper attitude of the soul until such time as God shall be pleased to give more light. The literature of the world upon speculative subjects reaches no certain conclusion; yet it will continue to make the unavailing attempt as long as human society lasts. It is not wise to allow the mind to be unduly occupied with what is so unsatisfactory, especially if hereby we are drawn aside from our plain duty and constancy of our faith in the immutable things. 2. *They are a wearisome exercise.* "Much study is a weariness of the flesh." This is true of the pursuit of ordinary knowledge. Nothing can be gained but by severe and constant exercises of the mind. Natural indolence must be overcome, the fear of difficulties overmastered, and all the anxieties of inquiry endured. The thinker has to pay the penalty of a weary brain and exhausted energies. When the knowledge gained is certain, and profitable for use or for delight, there is a grateful recompense. But how sad the fate of him who endures all the labour and anxiety for some pitiful and controverted conclusion! He wearies himself upon a profitless and endless task. II. Make Practical Use of what is Certainly Known. Solomon could have written at greater length upon the subjects on which he treated. He draws not to an end from lack of wealth in thought or language. But why go on? Life is too short for prolonged exercises of this kind. Duty is at hand, and there are stern realities to face. The reader is exhorted to give his attention to the "words of the wise," for they deal with those eternal truths which most concern man to know. They are truths not framed to satisfy the curious and unprofitable appetites of the mind, but to touch the heart, to rouse up the conscience, and to teach man his duty. What is thus certainly known is sufficient for every practical purpose. 1. *It is sufficient to guard us against real evils.* The Preacher has yet this to say, "By these, my son, be admonished." These words of the wise give warning against the greatest evils to which man is exposed. There are many calamities which afflict man in his fortune or his flesh, but these are light and passing when compared with the crushing and lasting evils that may fall upon the soul. These are the only real calamities. To lie under the displeasure of God is the awful disaster. The Psalmist, speaking of the testimonies of God, says, "Moreover by them is thy servant warned." No long and laborious study is required to learn what those evils are which we ought to dread most and to avoid. Unlike the speculations of the natural mind, the whole case of our spiritual danger may be put before us in few words. 2. *It is sufficient to teach us what is our highest good.* The "conclusion of the whole matter" is given in few and earnest words. They speak of duty to the Highest, and this is all that concerns man to know. When the whole of man's existence is taken into account, this alone has any real importance for him. How loved, how honoured once, avails him not if, after life is ended, he does not rest in the smile of God. Therefore, our only concern is to learn our duty, that we might not be ashamed when we come to appear before Him. Such knowledge is not too wonderful for us, but is obvious and familiar, easy and intelligible. It may be considered as consisting of two elements. (1.) *Right feelings towards God.* "Fear God." The Scripture lays great stress upon the condition of the heart, because from it proceed the "issues of life." The streams cannot be pure and sweet if the fountain is defiled. The heart determines what a man really is, for it is the origin and spring of moral action. The whole state of the feelings towards God is here spoken of under the name of fear, which (in the O.T. especially) is a word of wide signification. It is that feeling which both fears and loves—that filial awe which trembles lest it should offend, and yet knows no servile dread while it dwells under the shadow of a Father's love. It is not the fear of ignorance which trembles at the thought of unknown terrors, but that *intelligent fear* which arises from a due recognition of the relations in which we stand to God. It springs from the earnest realities of our moral situation, and is that disposition of the soul by which alone we can

walk humbly with God. 2. *Practical Obedience.* "Keep His commandments." Right feelings towards God must issue in obedience. Regard for another—for his person, for his rights, for the claims of his affection towards us, disposes us to a ready and loving service. Unless feeling does spend and employ itself in duty, it uses the power of the soul to no purpose, and only deceives us with the semblance of goodness. Uprightness in the life is the only infallible proof of uprightness in the heart. The commandments of God are the authoritative statements of our duty to all that is above, around, and beneath us. They have regard to all what we ought both to know, to feel, and to do. They are the statutes of God's kingdom, which all His subjects are bound to obey. According to the state of our heart, we feel them either a painful restraint, or the very charter of our liberty. Love to God turns them into a delight. When He enlarges our heart, we can run the ways of His commandments. The two great commandments of the Law speak of nothing else but right feelings, because, if these are present, right practice is sure to follow. There is a true "invariable sequence" in moral things. III. Recognise the Fact of Human Accountability. (Verse 14.) "For God shall bring every work into judgment." The future is thus brought into view in order to strengthen the motives for obedience. The Judgment to come is rendered necessary by the fact of human accountability. As certain as there is moral disorder in the world, and there is a God over all of infinite justice and purity, so certain is it that He will interfere with the course of human affairs, summon men before His bar, and assign to each his proper portion and place. If men are responsible to God, it is necessary that at some time their account should be rendered. However remote from Him we may feel ourselves to be, we shall have to come to Him for reckoning. The doctrine of the future Judgment is intended to influence our moral feeling and practice. This fact of human accountability, pointing as it does to the Judgment, should be practically recognised. 1. *Because it raises and ennobles the idea of life.* We may regard the fact, that we shall have to appear before God for Judgment, as a disadvantage—a source of dread and alarm. And so it must be, if we have resisted His will, and thus come under condemnation. But the fact of our accountability renders it possible for us, through the mercy of God, to obtain the reward of the righteous. Thus a prospect is opened, so sublime that the thought of it gives a supreme value to our life. The idea of Judgment implies that man shall live in a future state—that his individuality shall remain. This thought transfigures our poor human life, redeems it from the imputation of vanity, and our condition from meanness. Our inheritance is not brief life, but eternity. 2. *It acts as a wholesome moral restraint.* It is true that love in its highest moods does not think of restraint, but delights in its own freedom. Yet restraint is salutary, for it aids and guards weak virtue; and the highest virtue may be prevented thereby from the dangers of a fall. The thought that evil shall surely be punished is the first motive that urges us to righteousness—the higher and nobler motive comes afterwards. Also, the thought that even good actions shall come under the scrutiny of the Judge of all, tends to make us careful. Since the whole of our conduct shall be tested, we should look well to the purity of our motives. 3. *It casts the soul entirely upon God.* From His justice we can have no confident hope that we should see salvation, but rather we have much to fear. The chastisements of nature, and in the course of Providence, seem inflexible in their awful regularity. We have really no sure refuge but in the infinite charity of God. To please Him by our loving obedience should be the great endeavour of our life; for if we have this testimony, we may cherish a humble confidence that He will receive us in peace. Before the dread tribunal we all alike stand in need of mercy. If we can cast our souls upon God, even "these things to come"—though so terrible in themselves—cannot separate us from His love, which for us in Gospel times "is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES.

Verse 12. The Preacher doth wisely exhort us that we prefer saving studies, which are easily perceived, everlasting in their benefit, before those the search whereof is infinite, and the end whereof at last is only weariness and misery [*Jermin*].

"My son."—The voice of warning should have the style and tone of affection, and have regard to the ultimate good of him to whom it is addressed.

He who listens to admonition is one of the children of wisdom.

In the study of the Scripture, men should not aim at their comfort only, but mainly that they may receive clear information and warning of their sin and hazard, the true remedy thereof, and the way to attain to it; for this is one use to be made of this Book, and consequently of the rest of Scripture [*Nisbet*].

There is a deceitful literature of the world which attempts to deal with the highest questions that concern humanity. It refuses the teaching of Scripture regarding the nature, the chief good, and the destiny of man. It rejects the supernatural aid of faith, which imparts a new faculty to man, by which alone he can have consciousness of truths beyond the dull and prosaic scenes of this mortal life. There is no reason why such unwarranted speculations should not go on for ever. They never reach to any certainty on which the soul of man can rest. Hence men become dissatisfied with them, and in their efforts to obtain something better, only substitute one folly for another. This false wisdom, admired as philosophy in one age, becomes the derision and scorn of the next.

Whatever is built upon God's truth shall stand. All other foundations shall be removed when the storm arises; and though men may presume to build upon them again, yet their work is destined likewise to perish.

The truths of religion which bear upon practical duty are few and simple; but the speculations of the human mind, unaided by Divine light, are endless and confused. Hence he who engages in their study wearies himself in a fruitless task.

The study of the Word of God engages the attention, but it gives rest to the soul. All who love His law have great peace.

Verse 13. This conclusion is not the summing up of the reflections in this Book, but rather the practical end which "The Preacher" had in view. He is now coming to the chief point which concerns all.

"The conclusion of the whole matter is one of those "nails" and "goads" by which "The Preacher" endeavours to affect the heart and conscience.

The fear of God delivers the soul from every other fear—from the anxieties of restless inquiry—from distrust and suspicion of God—from murmuring and discontent.

To fear God is in our hearts to serve and honour Him; to keep His commandments is the outward demonstration of this inward devotion, in the conversation and actions of our lives to show ourselves [*Jermin*].

The keeping of the commandments is inseparably connected with the fear of God, because all true feeling is bound by a pleasing necessity to engage itself in the service of its object.

Reconciliation to God is like entering the gate of a beautiful avenue which conducts to a splendid mansion. But that avenue is long, and in some places it skirts the edge of dangerous cliffs; and, therefore, to save the traveller from falling over where he would be dashed to pieces, it is fenced all the way by a quickset hedge. That hedge is the commandments. They are planted there that we may do ourselves no harm. But, like the fence of the fragrant brier, they regale the pilgrim who keeps the path, and they only

hurt him when he tries to break through [*Dr. J. Hamilton*].

In the fear of God, and obedience to His will lies all that has any permanent value for man. Everything else will pass away, but this has an enduring substance.

It is not only the whole duty, but the whole honour, and interest, and happiness of man [*Wardlaw*].

Verse 14. "God shall bring:" loath is guilty man to come into judgment, and therefore he crieth to the hills to cover him, to the mountains to fall upon him; but mountains and hills and all shall forsake him, and God shall bring him to it. The best way, therefore, is of ourselves beforehand to go unto His judgment, and in our own hearts to arraign ourselves before God, for that is which will make His Judgment to be comfortable to us [*Jermin*].

The fact that God often comes into judgment with man, in the course of human history, is included in these words. But the future Judgment is chiefly intended. because the spirit returns to God that its true character may be revealed, and its true place assigned.

The future judgment will discover the realities of human conduct, for it will proceed upon perfect knowledge.

There will be such a development of character as shall justify the Supreme Judge, and the judgments He pronounces and executes, in the consciences of the condemned, and certify His unimpeachable righteousness to angels and men [*Wardlaw*].

The Judgment will bring to light both the hidden things of good and of evil—the secret deeds of shame, and the kind offices of retiring and modest worth.

In the light of the solemn account which we must all render to God, the life of man becomes as a seed from which a mighty forest is to spring.

The Christian lays the comfort to his heart that judgment is committed to the Son of Man. He knows that he has a Judge who can be "touched with the feeling" of his "infirmities." The purest soul needs this assurance.

HOMILETICAL

COMMENTARY

ON THE

SONG OF SOLOMON

BY

THOMAS ROBINSON, D.D.,

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PREFACE.

THE following work, like its predecessor on Job, was originally intended for the Van Doren Series. According to the design of the undertaking of which it now forms a part, its object is neither critical nor exegetical, but homiletical; the projector's aim being rather to supplement existing Commentaries, and to afford a practical aid to preachers who are supposed, more or less, to possess them. The work has, therefore, been thrown into such a shape as was thought most likely to meet the requirements of those who, with comparatively little opportunity for study, are called to dispense the Word of Life.

While this, however, was the main object, the Author has at the same time endeavoured to make his book as readable and profitable as possible to the private Christian. He has, therefore, introduced comparatively little in the way of critical elucidation of the text; and, as in the case of his work on Job, has given to such matter a place by itself at the end of the commentary.

The author, as far as he was able, has availed himself of the labours of those who have preceded him in the same field. Their views, however, in regard to the meaning or application of the text, will in general only be found among the appended notes. His own views, which are given rather in the commentary than in the notes, he has endeavoured to form, after giving the text the most careful consideration he was able, independently of what he has found in the numerous commentators consulted. His aim and desire has been, first to 'receive of the Lord,' and then to 'deliver' to His Church.

Of a book like the Song of Solomon, there will naturally be found a great diversity of interpretation. The exact meaning and application of a passage intended by the royal penman, or by the Holy Spirit who inspired him, it must necessarily be difficult in many cases to determine. This will no doubt be generally obtained in proportion as we may be under the teaching of the

same Spirit. 'For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God which is in him' (1 Cor. ii. 11). To obtain such teaching, however, we require to occupy a very humble place: 'Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes' (Matt. xi. 25). It is, however, not only in reference to single passages that a great variety of opinions is often found to exist. The same variety is found in reference to the nature and object of the book itself; some, though few, strangely regarding it as merely treating of earthly matters, with only a moral object in regard to the conjugal relation (the *profano-erotic* or *ethical* view), while the great body of expositors, both ancient and modern, Jewish and Christian, have regarded it as a Divine allegory, exhibiting spiritual things under the veil of natural ones. Here, however, we again find diversity. First, as to the *ground* or *basis* of the allegory; whether it is based upon an actual occurrence—a historical basis; and if so, what? Or whether it is formed upon an ideal transaction conceived by the poet himself under the Spirit's inspiration. Secondly, as to the spiritual *meaning* of the allegory; whether *experimental* in relation to the individual believing *soul* (the *mystico-spiritual* sense); or *doctrinal*, in relation to the Church as a whole (the *mystico-doctrinal*); or *prophetical*, whether in relation to the Church (the *mystico-prophetical*); or to Christ Himself (the *typico-Messianic*); or *historical*, in relation to the Church or nation of Israel (the *mystico-political*). To most of these applications of the allegory, few of which, perhaps, are entirely exclusive of the rest, reference will be found in the notes appended to the commentary.

The author's own view as to the basis of the allegory will be seen, both from the commentary and the introduction, to be rather that of Delitzsch, Zockler, and others; according to which Solomon is regarded as having, during an excursion into the country, in which he was attended by his nobles, met unexpectedly with Shulamite while engaged in rural pursuits, and struck with her charms, having asked and obtained her hand, brought her to the palace as his bride. The incident, however, he considers to have been probably rather a conception of the inspired poet than an actual fact, or at least possessing but a very slight substratum of reality; a conception bearing a strong resemblance to that of one of our own English poets, who, in one of his Oriental Eclogues, written doubtless without the slightest reference to the Song of Solomon, makes Abbas, a Georgian king, to have done exactly the same with Abra, a shepherdess, what Solomon is supposed, according to this view, to have done with Shulamite. This view the author

conceives to be more probable than either the older and more common one, which makes the basis of the poem to be the marriage of Solomon with Pharaoh's daughter; or the more modern one of EWARD and others, adopted also by Professor GODET, of Neufchatel, which makes Solomon to have carried off by force the object of his passion, and to have taken her to his palace, where he endeavoured in vain to detach her affection from the youthful shepherd to whom she was already betrothed.

That the form is a sacred allegory setting forth, under an external veil, the love, union, and communion existing between Jehovah or Messiah on the one hand, and the Church or people of God on the other, with allusion to points in the history both of the Church and its Head, is the view that, under various modifications, has been generally adopted both by Jews and Christians.

That such a view is the correct one, is rendered the more certain by the fact that similar allegorical or parabolic representations are not uncommon in the Scriptures; and that everywhere, both in the Old and New Testaments, the relation between God, or more properly the Messiah, and His Church or covenant people, is exhibited under the figure of a marriage: the former being frequently styled the Husband or Bridegroom, and the latter the Bride. In the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel, for example, the Jewish church or nation is represented as having been found by Jehovah as an outcast infant in the open field, rescued and reared, adorned and beautified by Him, and ultimately taken into union with Himself as His Bride. 'And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare. Now, when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine' (Ezek. xvi. 6—8).

LANE, in his valuable work on Modern Egypt, observes that, from the character of the Moslem songs sung at the *Zikrs*, or special religious services composed for the purpose, and intended only to have a spiritual sense, though not understood in that sense by the generality of the people, he cannot have any doubt as to the design of Solomon's Song. And although Sir William

Jones speaks doubtfully in reference to the existence of sacred allegory in ordinary Oriental poetry, Dr. KITTO remarks that the practice of setting forth spiritual subjects under the emblem of love is not confined to Arabian countries, but is found in Persia, India, and among the Rabbinical Hebrews; and gives it as his opinion that the allegorical or spiritual interpretation of the Song of Solomon is not only the right one, but the only possible one; and that, if the poem have any historical basis, the circumstances are so modified as to suit the spiritual purpose of the allegory, but would have been most unsuitable in a real history.

The reader will observe, that like some other expositors, I have divided the Song into parts, and these again into separate scenes. There can be no reasonable doubt that, while the remotest idea of performance is of course entirely out of the question, the poem is scenic or dramatic in its structure; exhibiting, as it does, without formally announcing it, a variety of characters in dialogue, in various situations, and under various circumstances; while, in the general presence of the 'daughters of Jerusalem,' a resemblance may even be seen to the chorus of the ancient Greeks. The separating of the parts of the poem, however, and the assigning to the speakers their proper place in the dialogues, while highly important to the right understanding of the passages, is often one of the most difficult tasks of the expositor. The speaker is indeed often, though not always, indicated either by the title given to the party addressed, or by the grammatical form of some of the words, apparent in the original, but not in an English translation.

None who is familiar with the Psalms of David and the writings of the prophets, will wonder at the language of ardent love and longing mutually expressed in the Song by the Bride and Bridegroom, viewed as representing the Lord Jesus Christ and His redeemed people. It may well be asked, why should earthly love be less ardent than that which is Divine and heavenly? and why should perfect excellence, and boundless, unmerited, self-sacrificing love be regarded with less ardour and affection, and be spoken of in colder terms, than that which is unspeakably inferior? Is it too much to say that the ardent language of many a Jacobite song, in reference to a prince who at best afforded but a specimen of fallen and imperfect humanity, might put to the blush many who profess attachment to the Prince of Life?

The Author is aware that, in some quarters, the Divine Book on which he has been engaged lies under a prejudice, as if unsuited for homiletical use. He trusts, however, that the attempt, now very imperfectly made, to provide a help in that direction, may not be in vain. If either the preacher

of the Gospel should derive benefit in his arduous but blessed and important employment from the commentary now prepared, as the writer is thankful to learn has been the case with that on Job or if the Christian reader should find himself assisted by it in his meditation on that portion of the inspired Word which the author has found so precious to himself, he will feel abundantly rewarded for the labour it has cost him. He prayerfully commends it, with all its imperfections, to the blessing of Him whose aid has been invoked in its preparation, and who has graciously promised in regard to His own Word: 'IT SHALL NOT RETURN UNTO ME VOID.'

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

Introduction.

I. Authorship. The poem generally regarded as the work of King Solomon. Perhaps though not certainly, indicated by the title. See on chap. i. ver. 1. Reasons in favour of this view:—1. General consent both of Jewish and Christian writers, ancient and modern. 2. The prevailing circle of images and references to facts and things; indicating the author to have lived in the time of Solomon, and to have been well acquainted with natural history, as Solomon is known to have been (*Kiel*). 3. The author well acquainted with all parts of the land of Israel, and greatly susceptible of impressions from the beautiful (*Delitzsch*). 4. Solomon known to have been largely employed in poetical composition (1 Kings iv. 32). 5. A relationship with the Book of Proverbs, known to be Solomon's, indicated by the language (*Hengstenberg*).

II. Canonicity and Inspiration. All but universally admitted. Formed part of the Jewish canon in the time of the Saviour, and always received as inspired Scripture by the Christian Church. Independent arguments for its inspiration;—The majesty of the style; the sublimity of the matter; its harmony with the rest of Scripture, especially in the leading idea of the bridal relation of the Church to Jehovah or the Messiah; its power, felt in all ages, in moving the affections towards the Divine Saviour.

III. Unity of the Book. The poem generally regarded as a united whole rather than a collection of independent odes. Arguments in favour of its unity:—1. The title—a "Song," not Songs. 2. The same persons introduced throughout, and in the same character; as—the King, called also Solomon, appearing as the friend and beloved of the virgin; the Virgin herself, called more definitely Shulamite, who appears throughout as the Fair One, the love, sister, and bride of the king; the Daughters of Jerusalem. 3. The same commencements and conclusions of long passages or divisions of the book; as at iii. 6; vi. 10; viii. 5; ii. 6, 7; iii. 5; viii. 3, 4. 4. The recurrence of the same ideas, and even of whole sentences, as in ii. 10–13 compared with vi. 11, vii. 12–14; iii. 1–4 with v. 2–8; iv. 1–3 with vi. 5–7; iv. 5 with vii. 4; i. 15 with iv. 1. 5. The same language throughout, even to the smallest peculiarities (*Hahn*). 6. Unity of scene. 7. The plan and tendency of the whole (*Ewald*).

IV. Internal Character of the Composition. An allegory, with a probable foundation in some historical fact or event in Solomon's life, as the occasion of it; the bridal relation between the Church and Christ being exhibited under the figure of a similar relation between King Solomon and Shulamite, a beautiful and pure-minded rustic maiden. Arguments in favour of the allegorical nature of the poem:—1. The general belief of both the Jewish and the Christian Church, both in ancient and modern times. 2. The unity and harmony of the Book, on this supposition, with the rest of Scripture. 3. The apparent reference to it in this sense by the writers and speakers of the New Testament, as Matt. ix. 15; John iii. 29; Rom. vii. 4; 2 Cor. xi. 2; Eph. v. 23—32; Rev. xix. 7; xxi. 9; xxii. 17 compared with Song iii. 11; iv. 8, 9, 10, 11; v. 1; and vii. 10; Matt. ii. 1 with iii. 2, and v. 6; Matt. ii. 11 with iii. 6; Matt. xviii. 12, 13, and Luke xv. 4—7 with ii. 2, 8, and vi. 8, 9. 4. The undeniable resemblance of the Song to the 45th Psalm, about whose allegorical meaning all are agreed. 5. Apparent indications in the poem itself; for example: "Shulamite" apparently used as a symbolical name (viii. 10), and as the name rather of a plurality in unity than of a single person (i. 3, 4; ii. 9, 15; v. 1; vii. 13; viii, 8, 12). "Baalhamon" not the name of any known real place, but apparently expressive of the world and its peoples as in a state of unrest and dispeace (Ps. xlvi 4, 7; Isaiah lvii. 20). 6. The acknowledged difficulty of giving a satisfactory explanation on the merely natural or historic theory, as indicated by the great want of unity among those who have adopted it.

V. The External Character or Form of the Composition. A dramatic poem, or a poem in the nature of a drama, embracing a variety of scenes and characters; these characters sometimes speaking in dialogue, and sometimes alone; with a subordinate party generally present and often taking part in the dialogue, in some respects corresponding to the Chorus of the ancient drama. The form of the poem thus in some degree resembling that of Job; the difference being that in Job each speaker is formally announced by the poet, which is not the case in the Song, the change and personality of the speakers being left to be inferred by the reader from the speeches themselves—a circumstance often rendering the interpretation more difficult, but greatly contributing to the energy and liveliness of the composition.

VI. The Object of the Book. Various objects probably contemplated by the Divine Author, whatever may have been the design of the human one. The leading object justly regarded as being to exhibit the intimate relation subsisting between the Church, whether viewed as a whole or in each of its true members individually, and its Divine covenant—Head and King, the Messiah, or Son of God in human nature; the relation being that of a Bride and Bridegroom—a relation constantly recognized in the Prophets in especial reference to the Church of the Old Testament (Isaiah liv. 5, 6; Jer. ii. 2; iii. 14; xxxi. 32; Hos. ii. 19, 20; iii. 3; Ezek. xvi. 32—38); and in the Evangelists and Apostles in reference to the Church of the New (Matt. ix. 15; John iii. 29; Rom. vii. 4; 2 Cor. xi. 2; Eph. v. 23, 32; Rev. xix. 7—9; xxi. 9; xxii. 17). As a part of this object, the Book designed to shew the amazing love of God in Christ as implied in that bridal relation; the transcendent excellence of the Divine Bridegroom; the privileges, duties, and responsibilities connected with this relation on the part of the Church as His Bride; the injury sustained by her from a conduct unbecoming it, and, on the other hand, the blessedness and honour connected with a faithful observance of its duties and improvement of its privileges. Practically, the edification of the Church the object of this as of the other parts of Scripture

(Rom. xv. 4; 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16); the aim of her Divine Head in giving this precious portion of Holy Writ being thereby to elevate, purify, sanctify, comfort, warn, direct, preserve, and stimulate the members of his mystical Body in every age; the Book exhibiting, with this view, a picture of the experience of believers while on earth—their hopes and longings, joys and sorrows, temptations and conflicts, falls and recoveries, love and service.

A coincident object of the book probably to afford a prophetical shadowing forth of the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Bridegroom, and of the general history of the Church after these events; as well as a dim allegorical picture of its development up to the time of their occurrence.

Possibly also a subordinate object contemplated in the Book in relation to marriage, viewed as an earthly though Divine institution; its duties being here, as in Eph. v. 23, &c., mirrored forth, on the one hand, in the affection and demeanour of the heavenly Bridegroom to His Church; and, on the other, in the duties belonging to the Church in relation to her Divine Husband.

VII. Divisions and Contents of the Book. The divisions variously made, but very generally considered as five or six, with several subdivisions. The first division may be viewed as extending from chap. i. 2 to ii. 7; the second, from chap. ii. 8 to iii. 5; the third, from chap. iii. 6 to v. 1; the fourth from chap. v. 2 to vi. 9; the fifth, from chap. vi 10 to the end of the Book. The last possibly divided at chap. viii. 4. The subjects under these divisions, as regards the allegory, may for convenience be distinguished thus:—Part First: The Meeting of the Betrothed. Part Second: The Nuptials. Part Third: The Marriage Feast. Part Fourth: The Coolness and its Consequences. Part Fifth: Married Life and its Incidents. The Book might be said to have three great divisions:—Before the Marriage; The Marriage Itself; and, After the Marriage. The divisions might be further reduced to two: The Period before and the Period after Marriage. Chap. iii. 2 apparently the centre of the poem.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

Title of the Book.

CHAPTER I. VERSE 1.

"The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's."

It is well, with Dr. Chalmers, to begin the study of this sacred book with the prayer: "My God, spiritualize my affections; give me intense love to Christ."

Two parts in the Title of the book as here given:—1. Its name and character—"the Song of Songs." 2. Its ascription—"which is Solomon's." The First part of the Title,

"The Song of Songs,"

Indicates—

I. *The* NATURE *of the Book.* A Song. Hence—

1. *Pleasant and joyous.* Song the language of joy. Indicates joy in those who sing, and aims at awakening joy in those who hear. This one of the 'songs in the night' given by our Maker and Saviour (Job xxxv. 10). The Holy Spirit the author of joy, and therefore the author of songs. This book all the more attractive from its being a song. Both old and young love songs, and are attracted by them. The subject of this book of a pleasing nature, and fit to be treated in a song. Marriage a joyful event, celebrated with festivity and music. The subject of this song a Divine and heavenly union. The song a spiritual Epithalamium, or Nuptial Ode. A song of the bride-chamber (Matt. ix. 15). A Gospel song, and one for Gospel times; the whole subject being the love of Jesus Christ to sinners and the salvation He brings to them. Gospel grace puts a new song in the mouth (Ps. xl. 3; xcviii. 1). The Gospel began with songs and ends with them. This book one of the 'spiritual songs,' in which believers are to 'speak one to another' (Eph. v. 19; Col. iii. 16). A large part of the Bible taken up with songs. The Word of God intended to be attractive. The Lord's ransomed ones to 'return and come to Zion with songs' (Isa. xxxv. 10).

2. *Profitable.* A song, like poetry in general, fitted to stir and move the affections. Songs found to have the most powerful influence on the minds and morals of a people. "Give me the making of the songs and ballads of a nation, and I will leave the laws to others." By the Jews the poetical parts of Scripture were especially esteemed, and often learned by heart.

II. *Its* EXCELLENCE. A 'Song of songs' A Hebrew expression denoting excellence as king of kings, heaven of heavens, &c. This not only excels all human, but all Divine songs. The Jews called other Scripture songs 'holy,' but this the 'holy of holies." The book worthy of this title on account of—

1. Its *Character as a Composition.* The most "beautiful example of Hebrew poetry in its highest style of metaphor and arrangement." More especially, however, on account of—

2. Its *Subject.* The bridal relation between the Son of God and His saved people. Christ's excellence and beauty, and His love to the Church as His bride. The Church's excellence and beauty as a reflection of His, and her happiness and honour in consequence of her bridal relation to Him. This song has the Holy Ghost for its author; the union and communion between Christ and believers for its matter; and the glory of God and the comfort of His people for its end. Here are prophecy, history, and the spiritual life, divinely woven into one symbolical robe of matchless beauty. The song a many-sided mirror reflecting the Lord's dealings with His Church, viewed both collectively and individually, as well in the Old Testament as in the New. Reveals mysteries of Divine love into which the angels desire to look. This book, next to the Gospels, the fullest of Christ, and therefore the sweetest to the Christian who is enlightened enough to understand it. A fountain at which prophets and apostles and the Lord Jesus Himself

refreshed their spirits Next to David's Psalms, the favourite book of the Bible with the Fathers of the Church. Its foundation laid in the Psalms; especially in that gem of Psalms, the forty-fifth. David sung the Bridegroom's future appearing, His conflicts, his sorrows, and his triumphs: Solomon sung His alliance and fellowship with His blood-bought bride. The song a labyrinth of exquisite flowers transplanted from heaven to earth. Wafts a perfumed breath of celestial spring from paradise to this world. The song "a maze of sweets, and a lovely obscurity." A heaven-given riddle in connection with the marriage of the Lamb, the true Samson; and only to be ploughed with His own heifer. Requires 'the mind that hath,' not earthly but, heavenly 'wisdom.' A mine of precious diamonds, demanding patient and prayerful labour and the Spirit's light to explore it and discover them.

The Second part of the Title—

"Which is Solomon's,"

Ambiguous. Probably indicates—

I. *The* AUTHOR *of the Book.* The literal Solomon, King of Israel, and wisest of men. *Best proof of wisdom, to celebrate the love of God in Christ, and to stir up ourselves and others to love Him in return.* Gradation in Solomon's writings: the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Canticles, or the Song. In Proverbs, Solomon sings of moral virtues and their benefits; in Ecclesiastes, of the vanity of earthly things; in Canticles, of Divine love and fellowship. Canticles a striking contrast to Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes, a mournful complaint of the disappointment found in the creature; Canticles a joyous song of the infinite satisfaction found in the Creator. Ecclesiastes points to earthly pleasure, and says: 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again'; Canticles points to God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and says: 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall never thirst.'—Solomon, with his hands full of state affairs, yet found time for spiritual meditation and the celebration of Divine love. *Worldly business, and diligence in it, no hindrance to love to Christ, and due concern for the spiritual interests of ourselves and others.*

II. *The* SUBJECT *of the Book.* The spiritual Solomon, the true Prince of Peace and King of Israel,—Solomon's great antitype. The true Solomon and his love to the Church the great subject of the Song. Solomon exhibited in the Bible as one of the types of the Messiah. Is so—

1. In his Names: 'Jedidiah,' Beloved of the Lord: 'Solomon,' the Peaceful.
2. In his Wisdom.
3. In his Riches and Magnificence.
4. In the wide extent of his Dominions.
5. In the peaceful character of his Reign.
6. In the prosperous and happy condition of his Kingdom.
7. In the erection of the Temple of God at Jerusalem.

Christ prefigured by Aaron as a priest, by Moses as a prophet; by David and Solomon as a King,—by the one in his conquests and by the other in his peaceful enjoyment of them. Solomon not called here, as in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, the King of Israel. His personality here lost sight of in his typical character. The type overshadowed by the antitype. *Christ, in one aspect or another, the central figure in all the Books of Scripture.* "Search the Scriptures; for they testify of Me." This said even of Old Testament Scripture. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." "He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (John v. 39; Rev. xix. 10; Luke xxiv. 27). The Scriptures all testify of Jesus. The Song testifies of Him as the King and Bridegroom of His Church, stooping to win and wed poor fallen humanity for His Bride. By the Jews, the Song understood of their Divine King to be manifested in the Messiah, and the Israelitish nation as the Bride whom He was pleased to espouse to Himself.

III. *The* DESIGN *of the Book.* For the true Solomon.

1. *For his Glory.* The glory of Christ, and of God in Him, the end of all Scripture as of all creation (Col. i. 16). Especially true of this portion of it, so full of Himself, of His excellencies, His joys, and His love.

2. *For his Use.* All Old Testament intended for his use as the perfect man (Ps. i. 1—3; 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16). Probably this portion of it especially, which speaks most about him. Reason to believe that the Psalms of David and the Song of Solomon formed the principal devotional books of our Lord (*Davidson*). As a child, Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature. In both respects, doubtless, through ordinary means. The sincere milk of the Word his daily food. What was designed for the Head, designed also for the members. What was used by the man Christ Jesus as His spiritual aliment and refreshment, to be used also by ourselves for ours. The Rabbinical rule that this Book was only to be read by those who had reached their thirtieth year, a mere human invention,—like others, rejected by Christ and to be rejected by us. 2 Tim. iii. 15—16, and Rom. xv. 4 clean against any such limitation. This Book, like

the rest of Scripture, to be read with seriousness and expounded with discretion ; but no argument against reading and preaching from it in the fact that evil men may abuse it. Ignorant men wrest also other Scriptures to their own destruction. "To the pure all things are pure." The holiest and most spiritually-minded have naturally delighted most in this Book, in which they find most of their Beloved and their Friend. Witness Bernard of Clairvoix, Samuel Rutherford, and Robert McCheyne. In Scotland's best times, the song of Solomon the chosen field of meditation at Sacramental seasons.

Two things needful for the profitable reading of this remarkable book :—(1) *A Christian experience.* The song a mirror of the believer's heart. Only taught by a Divine anointing, and only learned by a spiritual experience" (*Bernard*). Only to be properly understood by our becoming part of the Bride whose experience it portrays. (2) *A loving heart.* Like the forty-fifth Psalm, which it greatly resembles, the Song of Solomon a 'Song of loves' (Ps. xlv. *title*). The mystery of the song a mystery of love. Words of earthly love employed to elevate the soul to a heavenly one. A 'song of loves' requires a loving heart to understand, realize, and appreciate it. "Love's language a foreign tongue to one who does not love." Hence the song of Solomon pre-eminently a test for the state of the heart.

PART FIRST.

The Meeting of the Betrothed.

CHAPTER I. 2, TO CHAPTER II. 7.

SCENE FIRST. **Place:** *The Palace of Jerusalem.* **Speakers:** *Shulamite, or the Bride; and the Daughters of Jerusalem, or the Ladies of Solomon's Court.*—CHAP. i. 2—8.

SHULAMITE.

Addressing the King in his Absence.

Bride's Longing after the Beloved.

Verses 2—4.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth !
For thy love is better than wine.
Because of the savour of thy good ointments,
(Thy name is as ointment poured forth),
Therefore do the virgins love thee.

Draw me :
We will run after thee.

The King hath brought me into his chambers :
We will be glad and rejoice in thee ;
We will remember thy love more than wine :
The upright love thee.

Spiritually, the believer's longing for the sensible presence of Christ and the manifestation of His love. Probably the cry of the Ancient Church for the coming of the Lord's Anointed. According to the Jews, Israel's longing for the Divine reconciliation after the sin of the Golden Calf.

Bride's First Desire.

"*Let him kiss me with the kisses (or, with kisses) of his mouth*" (ver. 2). Shulamite speaks in soliloquy. Speaks of her Beloved as absent. Observe—

I. *The* PERSON *intended.* "Let *him ;*" namely, the Beloved. No name mentioned. The language abrupt but natural, as spoken under strong emotion. Expressive of *reverence.* So the disciples of Pythagoras Spoke of their master,—"He said." More especially, of *impassioned affection.* The Bride's thoughts full of her Beloved, as though there were but one object she cared for (Ps. lxxiii. 25). Christ to the believer the One Pearl of great price (Matt. xiii. 46). The language of a soul wearying of all but Christ. Bride speaks of her Beloved as if all must know whom she meant. So Mary to the supposed gardener : "If thou have borne Him hence" (John xx. 15).

Christ continually promised to the fathers through the prophets (Acts xxvi. 6 ; 1 Peter i. 11). The hope and expectation of Old Testament saints (Gen. xlix. 18 ; Isa. xxvi. 8 ; Matt. xiii. 17 ; John viii. 56 ; Acts xxvi. 7). Exemplified in Simeon, Anna, and others (Luke ii. 25, 26, 36—38 ;

iii. 15). Christ promised and expected as the Bridegroom of the Church (Hos. ii. 19; iii. 3; Isa. liv. 5; lxii. 5; John iii. 29).

II. *The* THING *desired.* Let him "kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." Personal and sensible manifestation of Christ and His love to the soul. The love itself not doubted: the expression, proof, and enjoyment of it desired. Christ's kiss is Christ Himself sensibly giving Himself in tenderest affection to the soul, and assuring it of His cordial love. The subject of the Song not the *coming to* the Saviour, but *communion with* Him: not the coming of the soul to Christ, but the coming of Christ to the soul. The language of the soul in the Song not that of the Publican: 'God be merciful to me a sinner'; but that of the Psalmist: 'My soul cleaveth to the dust: quicken thou me according to Thy word' (Ps. cxix. 25). The language of the text expressive of—

1. *Strong desire and eager longing.* 'Let him' (or, O that he would) 'kiss me.' Such longings a natural part of a healthy Christian experience. Feeble health little accustomed to fervent longings. A Christ loved will be a Christ longed for. Absence ill-brooked by ardent affection. Love yearns for the fellowship and enjoyed love of its object.

2. *Intimate acquaintance.* Familiar acquaintance with Christ begets not contempt, but reverence and love.

3. *Consciousness of union with and interest in the Beloved.* Kisses not for strangers, still less for enemies. Expected only by a friend, and most of all by a Bride or wife.

4. *Mutual affection.* Kisses desired only from one who loves us and whom we ourselves love. An aggravation of Judas's sin that he betrayed his Master with a kiss. A true kiss the 'kiss of charity' or love (1 Pet. v. 14).

5. *Absence and delay.* Sensible tokens of Divine love not always vouchsafed to believers. Christ's kisses not things of every day. At times wisely withheld. 'A time for embracing, and a time to refrain from embracing.' Patience required in respect to spiritual joys. The time coming when delay and withdrawal will be no more.

6. *Desire for manifested reconciliation.* So Israel longed after the Lord after the sin of the golden calf (Ex. xxxiii. 1—4, 7—11); and in the time of Samuel (1 Sam. vii. 2). A kiss the token of reconciliation given by David to his son Absalom, and by the forgiving father to the prodigal and penitent son (2 Sam. xiv. 33; Luke xv. 20).

The desire expressed by *each* believing soul *for itself:* 'Let him kiss *me.*' The living soul desires personal enjoyment of Christ's love and the personal application of it. Christ's kisses for His Church universal, and for each true member of it in particular. Each believing soul the Church in miniature. The features, experience, and glory of the Church those of each individual member.

The thing desired—(1) '*Kisses.*' Implies coldness of faith and affection. To receive even a *kind word* from Christ an unspeakable favour and happiness. Christ able and willing to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think (Eph. iii. 20). Grants not only the adoption of a son, but the espousals of a bride (*Theodoret*). The Bride appears to desire not only one kiss but many. Even *one* not to be purchased with a thousand worlds. How rich the believer in receiving many! Even one a thing never to be forgotten. One of Christ's kisses carries heaven in its bosom. Kisses of different kinds and for different occasions: the kiss of favour, of friendship, of affection, of reconciliation, of relationship, of nuptial contract, and of marriage. The marriage-covenant between Christ and His people permits and grants the renewal of its seals and pledges. (2) 'Kisses *of his mouth.*' These reserved more especially for his personal appearing. 'Let him kiss me, not by the mouth of the prophets, but with his own mouth' (*Rabbins*). The desire a prophetical intimation of His coming in the flesh. Realized when men wondered at "the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth" (Luke iv. 18—22). "Be of good comfort, thy sins are forgiven thee;" "Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace"—some of these kisses. Such also every Gospel promise and gracious consolation uttered and applied by Jesus to the penitent believing soul. 'The lip of promise meeting the lip of prayer.' Christ's office to "Preach glad tidings to the meek; to bind up the broken hearted; to comfort them that mourn; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Isa. lxi. 1—3; Luke iv. 18, 19). His mouth most sweet (chap. v. 16). 'His mouth,' as marking the tenderest affection. Amazing condescension that the King of glory can stoop from His throne to kiss a beggar taken from the dunghill. Ample compensation for the loss of idols in the kisses of the King's mouth. The soul that gives up all for Him, sooner or later filled and overpowered with His love. The 'kisses of his *mouth*' not only the communications of His love but of *His spirit.* According to the Jews, a man's loving kiss is accompanied with an infusion of his spirit. So Jesus, after saying: Peace be unto you,—breathed on His disciples, and said: Receive ye the Holy Ghost (John xx. 21, 22). Christ's kisses given in the reading and hearing of His word; in secret and social prayer; and in the ordinance

of the Supper. The consolations of His Word personally applied by Himself to the heart through His Spirit. The kisses to be given by His own mouth. All Gospel duty summed up in our kissing the Son; all Gospel comfort summed up in the Son kissing us. Christ's kisses in the Gospel intended to heal the wounds of the Law. The kisses of His mouth in the highest sense still kept in reserve. Jerusalem above the place where the Lord mainly comforts His people (Isa. lxvi. 13). There they see His face. His hand wipes away their tears. He Himself feeds them and leads them to living fountains of waters. Hence His second appearing the desire of believers in the New Testament, as His first appearing was that of those in the Old (Tit. ii. 13; 1 Cor. i. 7; Phil. iii. 20; 2 Pet. iii. 12). The last promise of Christ in the Bible: Surely I come quickly. The last prayer of His Church: Even so, come, Lord Jesus (Rev. xxii. 20).

Reason of Bride's First Desire.

"*For thy love* (Heb. *loves*) *is better than wine.*"—Verse 1.

With the next breath Shulamite turns to her Beloved and addresses himself, though still absent and invisible. A believer's communion with Christ on earth rather that with an invisible friend. Want of bodily sight no hindrance to spiritual fellowship. Christ, though invisible to the eye of flesh, yet visible to the eye of faith. Common, under strong feeling, to address a friend though distant and unseen. The living and loving soul not satisfied with speaking *of* Christ, but must speak *to* Him. 'He' to be exchanged for 'Thou.' The reason for the soul desiring the kisses of Christ's mouth is the excellence and sweetness of His love and the manifestations of it. An object desired in proportion to the sense of its worth. Observe in regard to the—

Excellence of Christ's Love.

I. *The* LOVE *itself.* 'Thy love,' or as *margin*, 'thy loves'—not only the love itself, but the manifestations of it. Christ's love always one and the same; the expressions and manifestations of it many and various. His love well represented in the plural form, from its riches, abundance, and extent. Paul's prayer that believers might be strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit, so as to comprehend with all saints what is its length, and breadth, and depth, and height, and to know it though really passing all knowledge (Eph. iii. 16—19. Observe—

1. The *character* of Christ's love. Like the love of the Father it is—(1) Everlasting (Jer. xxxi. 3). (2) Unchanging (John xiii. 1). (3) Spontaneous and free (Ezek. xvi. 5, 6, 8; 1 John iv. 10, 19). (4) Sovereign and distinguishing (John vi. 70; xiii. 18; xv. 16). (5) Costly and self-sacrificing (Eph. v. 25; Rev. i. 5). (6) Enriching in its effects (Eph. v. 26, 27; Rev. i. 5, 6).

2. The *manifestations* of it. These both in word and deed. Made in—(1) His engaging for us in the everlasting covenant (Ps. xl. 7; Eph. v. 25). (2) The revelation of His love in the first promise in Eden (Gen. iii. 15). (3) The successive communications of it through the prophets. (4) His gracious dealings with His people in the Old Testament. (5) The personal manifestations of Himself to the patriarchs and Old Testament saints. (6) His INCARNATION. (7). His acts, words, and teachings when on earth. (8). His sufferings and death. (9). The bestowment of His Spirit on and after Pentecost. (10) His promises to His Church made before and after His ascension into heaven. (11) The ordinances which He instituted, especially that of the Supper. (12) The ingathering of His Redeemed by the preaching of the Word. (13) The personal communications of His love to the souls of His people. (14) His gracious providential dealings with His Church, both as a whole and in its individual members.

II. *The* EXCELLENCE *of the love.* 'Thy love is better than wine.' Wine put for what is most grateful to the taste, refreshing to the body, and exhilarating to the spirits. Wine among the chief luxuries of life. The 'banquet of wine' (Esther v. 6) put for the most joyous of feasts. Yet Christ's love 'better than wine.' (1) From *the nature of love itself.* Love and the expression of it among the sweetest of human enjoyments. Hence the 'comfort of love' (Phil. ii. 1). (2) From *the person whose love it is.* A sinful and imperfect creature's love often the sweetest of earthly enjoyments. What the love of Him who is the 'Chief among ten thousand,' 'fairer than the children of men,' 'altogether lovely,' the sum, source, and centre of all loveliness and excellence! Christ's love better than wine, as—

1. *More sweet, gladdening, and refreshing* (Ps. iv. 7, 8). 'Sweet is the King's wine, but sweeter is his love' (*Delitzsch*). The sense of Christ's love the true cordial of the soul.

2. *More satisfying.* The old wine, after which none desires new. Takes from creature enjoyments much of their attraction. The world crucified to us by the cross of Christ,—the highest expression of this love.

3. *More beneficial.* Exhilarates the *soul*; and through that, influential on the whole man. Purifies while it gladdens. No danger of excess or of hurtful consequences. Wine a mocker. At last bites like a serpent and stings like an adder (Prov. xx. 1; xxiii. 32). Christ's love leaves no sting behind it. Betrays none into sin. Exhilarates without inebriating.

4. *More lasting in its effects.* Wine perishable, and soon ceases even to exhilarate and refresh. Christ's love eternal and unchanging in its effects as well as in itself. That only strictly true of Christ's love which is said of wine: 'Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more' (Prov. xxxi. 6).

The excellence of Christ's love not to be described (Ps. xxxvi. 7—10). To be *tasted* in order to be known (Ps. xxxiv. 8; 1 Pet. ii. 3). Able to fill the soul with joy in the absence of all earthly comforts, and the loss of all earthly possessions (Hab. iii. 17, 18). The Holy Spirit's office to reveal it and shed it abroad in the heart (Rom. v. 5). Hence the exhortation: 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be ye filled with the Spirit' (Eph. v. 18). Joy in the experience of Christ's love the characteristic of the New Testament dispensation. Symbolized in His first miracle. The water of the Old Testament economy turned into the wine of the New. The consecration of wine as the symbol of His shed blood, and so of His dying love, among the last acts of the Saviour's love. Hence the Lord's Supper made the sweetest and most reviving of all Divine ordinances. Christ's love the joy of the Redeemed in heaven. The new wine of the kingdom. The song of the Beloved Disciple's old age, seventy years after tasting of it as he lay on Jesus's breast. The ever new song of the saints around the throne (Rev. i. 5; v. 9—12).

The Bride Justifies her Desire.

'*Because of the savour of thy good ointments* (*thy name is as ointment poured forth*), *therefore do the virgins love thee*'—Verse 3.

Her desire justified on two grounds: (1) The excellence and sweetness in the Beloved himself; (2) The fact that on that account virgins loved him.

FIRST GROUND: '*Because of the savour of thy good ointments,—thy name is as ointment poured forth;*' or, '*ointment poured forth is thy name.*' The first clause the formal reason for the virgins' love to the King; the second, a parenthetical amplification and explanation of the former, his name being itself those good ointments (Eccles. vii. 1). 'The savour of thy good ointments' or perfumes, suggests—

The Excellence and Sweetness of Christ

I. *Christ has 'ointments' or perfumes.* The king's ointments sweetly scented oils sprinkled on the garments, poured on the head, or carried about the person. Christ's ointments the graces of the soul and life, shed on Him and produced in Him by the Holy Spirit. The existence of such ointments indicated in His official name, 'Christ,' or 'the Christ.' This the Greek rendering of the Hebrew term Messiah; both meaning 'the Anointed One.' Christ, as God's appointed Saviour, anointed with the Holy Ghost, and that without measure (John iii. 34: Acts iv. 8; Luke iv. 18). This anointing that which fitted Him for His office (Isa. lxi. 1—3). Anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows (Heb. i. 9). All His mediatorial garments thus made to 'smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia,' by which He was made glad (Ps. xlv. 8). His human nature thus made full of all excellence and sweetness. Christ fully endowed with all the virtues that can either adorn the character, or that can render a man lovely and attractive in himself, and a benefactor and blessing to his fellow men (Isa. xi. 2—5). All the excellences and charms that can either beautify or exalt humanity found in Him in their combination and perfection. Graces and virtues apparently contradictory and exclusive of each other, found beautifully harmonized in His character. Symbolized by the 'holy anointing oil,' composed of various ingredients (Ex. xxx. 23—25, 34, 35). Loftiest wisdom combined in Jesus with child-like simplicity; awe-inspiring dignity with meekest humility; inflexible justice with tenderest compassion; spotless holiness with sweetest affability; abhorrence of sin with pity and love to the sinner. The Gospels an exhibition of the 'good ointments' of Christ. His life, as written by the four Evangelists, the best commentary on this verse.

II. *Christ's ointments are 'good.'* They are so—

1. *In themselves.* The graces and virtues of His character, of the purest and choicest kind, and existing in Him in the highest degree. All Divine, as the product of the Holy Ghost which filled Him. God well pleased for His righteousness' sake (Isa. xlii. 21). The testimony twice repeated from heaven: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matt. iii. 17; Luke. ix. 35). The goodness or excellence of Christ's 'ointments' discovered—(1) In His *spirit and disposition.* 'Meek and lowly in heart.'

Gentle and compassionate, not breaking the bruised reed nor quenching the smoking flax. 'Holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.' (2) In His *words*. Gracious words proceeded out of His mouth. 'Never man spake like this man.' The Gospels a repertory of such golden sayings as never before had fallen from human lips. (3) In His *actions*. 'He went about doing good.' Even in His outward actions, acknowledged to have been the greatest benefactor the earth had ever seen before or has ever beheld since. His earthly ministry one continued display of self-denying beneficence to the poor, the suffering, and the distressed. (4) In His *sufferings and death*. In these, peculiarly distressing as they were, a picture displayed of the most perfect patience and submission. His dying breath a prayer on behalf of His persecutors and murderers, while His only complaint was that poured forth to His Father in the words of the Psalmist: My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? (Ps. xxii. 1; Matt. xxvii. 46).

2. *In their effects*. Ointments or perfumes valued for their refreshing fragrance. Hence poured on the head of guests at table. The graces and virtues of Christ's character all such as rendered Him a Benefactor and Saviour to mankind. Fitted by the Holy Spirit's anointing to preach glad tidings to the poor, bind up the broken hearted, &c. (Isa. lxi. 1, 2.) The poorest, lowest, and guiltiest attracted to Him by His gracious and loving spirit, as well as by His heavenly and healing words (Luke xv. 1). Even little children drawn to Him by the savour of His 'good ointments.' In the graces and virtues of His character, as well as the sacrificial surrender of His life, Christ a sweet-smelling savour to God. His words quickening, reviving, comforting and gladdening as well to sinners as to saints.

In the view of Shulamite, the King's *name*, including in it the report of his graces and excellencies (1 Kings x. 1, 6—9), constituted in itself a rich perfume. 'Thy name is as ointment poured forth;' or, 'ointment poured forth is Thy name' (Eccles. vii. 1). Sweetly true in regard to Solomon's Antitype. Observe, in reference to the

Name of Christ—

I. *The* NAME *itself*. The name of a person often put simply for the person himself. All that is in Jesus, and that is known of Him, renders Him 'as ointment poured forth.' The chief among ten thousand. Precious to them that believe. In Him is all that sinners need and that is suited to their case and condition. His character and worth that which renders Him to believers the object of their warmest affection and their most entire confidence. The name or names by which He is known indicative of what He is in Himself, and what He is and becomes to us. His names all significant and suggestive of His character and work. Their meaning such as to commend Him to sinners, and to endear Him to saints. Each name an exhibition of Him in some special aspect of loveliness and preciousness. Examples:—

1. EMMANUEL. His name in prophecy (Isa. vii. 14). Its meaning, 'God with us' (Matt. i. 23). Full of sweetness. God for our salvation become one of us—a partaker of flesh and blood—in order to be our Redeemer. God manifest in the flesh. The Eternal Word made flesh and dwelling among us. The name a reviving revelation of boundless love, pity, and condescension on the part of our Maker. The Beloved of the Church one who is both God and Man. 'The man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts' (Zech. xiii. 7). One with the Father, and yet one with us. The bright reflection of the Divine glory, and yet bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Possessed of all the attributes of the God-head, and all the sympathies of humanity. Sustains the glory of Deity, and is touched with the feeling of all our infirmities. The Creator and Upholder of the universe, and yet tempted in all points like as we are (Heb. i. 2, 3; iv. 15). Hence (1) *His infinite power as a Saviour*. Able to save to the uttermost. Mighty to save. Able to raise both the dead soul and the dead body to life. (2) *The infinite efficacy belonging to His sacrificial undertaking*. His suffering and death that of 'God manifest in the flesh.' God purchased the Church with His own blood—a sufficient price for the ransom of countless worlds (Acts xx. 28). The blood of Jesus Christ, because the blood of God's Son, able to cleanse from all sin (1 John i. 7).

2. JESUS. Given, at the direction of an angel, as the equivalent of 'Emmanuel' (Matt. i. 21—23). A name full of exquisite sweetness. Denotes—'Jehovah the Saviour;' or, 'the Lord will save.' God Himself becomes our Salvation. 'Jesus,' a Divine Saviour; hence equivalent to 'Emmanuel.' A Saviour needed by man, and a great one Such found in Jesus. Hence His name. Saves, as was necessary, both from sin and sin's consequences; not only from its guilt and punishment, but from its power, pollution, and presence; saves from a blinded understanding, a depraved will, and a corrupt heart. Saves from sin and Satan, from death and hell, and from the power and influence of a present evil world

Saves at once, and saves for ever. Saves *now* by the invisible operation of His Spirit; saves hereafter by His visible and glorious appearing (Heb. ix 14, 28). Able to save even the chief of sinners (1 Tim. i. 15). To save the lost the object of His coming into the world (Luke xix. 10; 1 Tim. i. 15).

3. CHRIST, *or* THE CHRIST. His official name. Both a name and a title. Like the Hebrew term 'Messiah,' denotes 'the Anointed.' A name also full of sweetness. Marks Him out as anointed by the Holy Ghost as the Prophet, Priest, and King of His Church. Anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows (Ps. xlv. 7). Anointed by the Spirit to preach glad tidings to the meek, &c (Isa. lxi. 1). Jesus the *Christ*, as filled with the Holy Spirit, and so fitted for man's salvation.

His 'name' may include (1) His *Titles*: as; Son of God, Son of Man, King of Kings, Prince of Peace, Lamb of God, Prince of Life, Lord of Glory, Plant of Renown, the Word, the Word of God, our Hope, our Peace, our Life. (2) His *Offices*: as; Prophet, Priest, King, Mediator, Redeemer, Captain, Physician, Teacher, Witness-bearer, SAVIOUR. (3) His *Relations*: as; Husband, Brother, Father, Friend, Shepherd, Surety, Master. (4) His *Attributes*: as; Merciful, Faithful, True, Almighty, Everlasting, Unchanging, the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. (5) His *Character*: as; meek, lowly, loving, holy, just, wise, and good.

No name mentioned in the text. The name deep in the heart. No name like His in a believer's ear. Remembered when every other name is forgotten. The name which is above every name. Known truly to none but Himself and those to whom He reveals it. Wherever known, accompanied with love and trust (Ps. xci. 14; ix. 10).

II. *The* COMPARISON. 'As ointment poured forth.'

1. As '*ointment*' or *perfume*. Indicates its sweet and reviving nature. To a believer the very mention of Jesus accompanied with joy and comfort. Every name of Jesus fragrant to the spiritual senses. The name of a loved one sweet because calling up the person himself. The name of Jesus makes the sad heart it enters leap with joy. Is honey to the mouth, music to the ear, and comfort to the soul. Everything insipid to a believer that carries not the savour of that name in it. "All spiritual food dry, if not pervaded with this oil; and tasteless, if not seasoned with this salt." What is written has no relish to a believer, if he reads not there the name of Jesus. Conversation has no pleasure if the name of Jesus is excluded. Nature with all its loveliness only pleases when associated with the name of Jesus. His name suggestive of all that is most beautiful, lovely, and excellent. "Contains in it all the excellence scattered throughout creation." The best, sweetest, purest, noblest things associated with it. Embraces whatever is noblest in truth, honour, faith, love, meekness, humility, self-denial, generosity. All tenderness, sweetness, benevolence, centred in the name of Jesus. Gentleness, moral courage, disinterested love, identified with it. In His name, more sweetness, beauty, love, than ever human heart conceived To a renewed and spiritual mind, the most joyous and exhilarating name on earth. "Touches all the chords of gratitude, enthusiasm, and devotion." Under the Holy Spirit's revelation, fills every avenue of the soul with joy, wonder, and adoration. A day coming, when it will fill heaven and earth with its sweetness and fragrance.

2. As 'ointment *poured forth*.' Indicates—(1) *Abundance*, as well of the ointment itself as of its fragrance. The perfume abundantly diffused. An infinite fulness in Jesus, and an infinite sweetness in His name. 'It hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.' 'God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him.' His glory that of the only begotten of the Father, 'full of grace and truth' (John i. 14: iii. 34; Col. i. 19). Christ a full Saviour for empty sinners A fountain ever full and ever flowing His riches without a bottom. A mine never exhausted.

> Enough for each, enough for all,
> Enough for evermore.

(2) *Impartation*. A perfume poured forth yields up all its fragrance for enjoyment. Enclosed and sealed up in the vessel, it affords little sweetness. Mary broke her alabaster box, or its seal, and the whole house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Christ's name not only ointment but ointment 'poured forth,' for the benefit and enjoyment of others. Christ to be manifested—

Externally. Christ and His name was a perfume in heaven while shut up 'in the bosom of the Father.' A perfume to God and angels before man was created. Shut up as to men till the day of the fall. The first promise of a Saviour made in Eden broke the seal (Gen. iii. 15). The seal more and more removed, and the fragrance made more and more to flow forth, as time rolled on. The promised Saviour more and more plainly and fully revealed through the prophets, till He Himself appeared The ointment then poured forth—(1) *By*

Christ Himself: (*a*) in His life; (*b*) in His preaching; (*c*) in His miracles; (*d*) in His death. The seal of the casket containing the perfume that was to fill heaven and earth with its fragrance fully broken on Calvary when Jesus said: 'It is finished,' bowed His head, and died; (*e*) in His effusion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. (2) *By the Apostles and the Church after Pentecost.* Till then the 'name' shut up among the Jews: after that, to be carried by the Apostles to all nations. The ointment streaming forth more or less over the world during the last eighteen centuries The calling and commission of the Church at large, as well as of Apostles, ministers, and missionaries, to make manifest the savour of his knowledge in every place (2 Cor. ii. 14). 'Ye are My witnesses.' Every believer, by his lips and his life, to be a bearer of the fragrance of Christ's name in the neighbourhood where he dwells.

Internally. This ointment to be poured forth *in the soul* in order to the perception of its sweetness. Mere external diffusion not sufficient. A spiritual fragrance to be spiritually perceived. A spiritual power of perception needed; or, what is equivalent, an inward spiritual revelation of Christ by the Holy Ghost. 'It pleased God to reveal His Son in me.' 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.' 'Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes.' God 'hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. iv. 6; Gal. i. 16; Matt. xvi. 17; xi. 25). Without the inward diffusion of the fragrance by the Holy Ghost (John xvi. 14, 15), Christ 'a root out of dry ground, without form or comeliness' (Isa. liii. 2). A man's greatest blessedness in having this precious ointment poured forth in his heart (Rom. v. 5). The perfume of Christ's name to be poured forth *externally* by the Church, through the lips and lives of its members, to the world at large; *internally* by the Holy Ghost to the individual soul. The Word and Sacraments the instituted means through which the Spirit pours forth the ointment, both externally and internally. Sinners saved and believers refreshed, revived, and sanctified only as Christ's name is thus revealed and the ointment poured forth. The Scriptures, a preached Gospel, the Bread and Wine in the Supper,—these the casket containing the perfume; the Holy Ghost the agent who breaks the seal and pours forth the fragrance.

Important questions for each: Have I known this precious name? Is the name of Jesus to *me* 'as ointment poured forth?' If so, what am I doing to diffuse its fragrance for the benefit of others? If not, why so? Have I given proper attention to that name? Have I seriously thought of Christ? 'The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick:' have I realized my spiritual sickness? Have I seriously considered and really known what it is to be a sinner, and so realized my need of a Saviour? If not, how can I expect the name of Jesus to be sweet and precious to *me*? Lord, let me not rest till I have done so. Give me *now*, by Thy Holy Spirit, to realize my need of Christ, and to see His preciousness.

The Effect of Solomon's Excellencies.

"Therefore do the virgins love thee."

The report of the king's excellencies and attractions had reached Shulamite, as it had done the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings x. 1). The effect of these excellencies was that the virgins loved him; among the rest Shulamite herself. So the excellencies of Christ render Him, as they may well do, the object of love to all sincere and rightly disposed persons who came to hear of them. In reference to—

Love to Christ,

the text suggests—

I. *The* PERSONS *who love Him.* The 'virgins' representatives of—

1. *Believers,* or *renewed persons* in general. Virgin-souls—those whose hearts are given entirely to God and Jesus Christ. Those who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth (Rev. xiv. 4). Believers to be presented to Christ as a chaste virgin (2 Cor. xi. 3). The true members of the Jewish Church so called (Jer. xxxi. 4, 21). Believers 'virgins'—(1) From their *pure and undivided affection* to Christ; (2) From their *chaste and faithful adherence* to Him and His cause; (3) From their *true and Scriptural views* of Him and His religion; (4) From the *purity of their worship and general conversation*; (5) From their *meekness, modesty, and tenderness* of conscience; (6) From their *moral beauty and comeliness* of spirit. Observe—(1) *Christ only loved by virgin-souls,* whose hearts are detached from the world. Men cannot serve God and mammon, or love Christ and the world If any man love the world, the love of the Father and of Christ is not in him. A divided heart cannot love Christ. Those only His true lovers who are willing to leave all and follow Him. Hence

—(2) *Only renewed and regenerate persons love Christ.* The carnal mind enmity against God, and so against Christ. The heart renewed and circumcised in order to love God and His Son (Deut. xxx. 6). The stony heart taken away and a heart of flesh given instead (Ezek. xxxvi. 26). (3) *All renewed souls love Christ.* Christ the magnet that attracts renewed hearts. A natural affinity between Christ and renewed souls. Such able both to see and appreciate His excellence, both in Himself and in relation to sinners. The language of renewed and enlightened souls: 'The love of Christ constraineth us' (2 Cor. v. 14). (4) *The glory and honour of Jesus, that He is loved only by pure and sincere souls, and by all such.*

2. *Young converts*, more particularly. First love of believers often warmest. The kindness of Israel's youth tenderly remembered by the Lord (Jer. ii. 2). The believer's young love often damped by the power of corruption within, and the influence of the world without. The main charge which the Lord Jesus brought against the Church of Ephesus, that it had left its 'first love' (Rev. ii. 4).

3. *Men in general*,—especially, men of single and sincere hearts. Christ the suitable object of human love, both as a perfect man and as a loving Saviour. Men of honest and sincere hearts the most likely to love Christ. Hence the attachment of a Nathanael and a Cornelius, of a Nicodemus and a Joseph of Arimathæa. Men who are 'Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile,' readily drawn to Christ. Christ the 'Desire of all nations,' fitted to be such, and actually to become such. Men only prevented from loving Christ by the blindness of their minds and the depravity of their hearts. *Love to Christ the test of a man's character.* Men worthy to be 'accursed' who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. xvi. 22).

4. *Angels, who have never sinned.* Christ the object of angelic love. His sufferings on earth and His glory in heaven lovingly contemplated by angels (1 Pet. i. 11, 12). Angels rejoiced to minister to Him, and still minister to His members for His sake. The first to announce His birth, and the companions of the redeemed in celebrating His praise.

II. *The* LOVE *itself.* Christ the object first of a sinner's faith, then of his love. True faith in Christ, a 'faith which worketh by love.' Men's love desired by Christ: 'My son, give Me thine heart.' The love of the woman of Sychar refreshes Him more than meat and drink. Nothing without men's love satisfied Christ. 'If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned' (chap. viii. 7). Christ infinitely worthy of men's love—(1) For what He is in Himself; (2) For what He has done for them. Observe—

1. The *character* of a believer's love to Christ. It is—(1) Natural and reasonable. (2) Ardent and sincere. (3) Paramount and supreme. (4) Undivided and admitting no rival. (5) Active and practical. (6) Self-denying. (7) Pure and holy. (8) Permanent and abiding. (9) Unconquerable and unquenchable. (10) Divine in its origin. (11) Self-evidencing.

2. The *evidence* of this love. Shews itself—(1) In obedience to His will. (2) In devotedness to His service. (3) In love to His fellowship. (4) In imitation of His spirit and conduct. (5) In affection to His people, His cause, and all that belongs to Him.

Bride's Second Desire.

'*Draw me, we will run after thee.*'—Verse 4.

Shulamite's *first* desire for the bridegroom's kisses; her *second* desire for the bridegroom himself. Spiritual desire grows and enlarges itself. Christ better than even His kisses. The text contains—I. A Request: II. A Resolution.

1. *The* REQUEST. 'Draw me.' Christ the magnet of renewed souls. The desire of all such to be *drawn* to Him. The request the result—(1) Of acquaintance with Him; (2) Of love to Him; (3) Of desire to enjoy and follow Him. Implies—(1) *Perception of Him*, as the One Pearl of great price; the Treasure hid in the Field; the chief among ten thousand; the Altogether Lovely. (2) *Desire after Him.* Renewed and saved souls not content to be at a distance from Christ, or to sit still in such a condition. Their desire to be near Him, lean on His bosom, rest in His arms, sit at His feet, hear His voice, look on His pierced hands and side. (3) *Conscious inability.* The soul unable of itself to come to Christ, run after Him, or follow Him. The renewed soul conscious of that inability. Hence the prayer: 'Quicken us, and we will call upon Thy name.' 'My soul cleaveth to the dust; quicken me according to Thy word.' 'Turn me and I shall be turned.' The soul conscious of Divine help in following hard after God (Ps. lxiii. 8; cxix. 32). *Grace, teaches us both Christ's worth and our own weakness.* Christ the Author as well as the Object of our faith. The soul kept from Christ, and from following after Him, by a three-fold hindrance—(1) The flesh; (2) The world,

(3) The Devil. Christ first draws souls *to* Him, and then *after* Him. Observe in regard to—

The Saviour's Drawing.

1. *The* MEANING AND IMPORT *of it.* A threefold drawing of the soul by Christ—(1) In conversion to Him; (2) In following after Him; (3) In communion with Him. The last here especially intended. The desire in verse 2, followed by that in verse 4 as a means towards it. To enjoy Christ's kisses we have to be drawn to Christ Himself. Christ draws—(1) Our *attention*, keeping it fixed on Himself; (2) Our *desire and longing*, as in the case of the woman of Sidon (Matt. xv. 21—28); (3) Our *affection*; (4) Our *resolution*; (5) Our *self-surrender*; (6) Our *confidence and faith*. Implies not only faith, but perseverance in it (1 Pet. i. 5).

2. *The* MEANS *by which He draws.* Christ draws by showing—(1) His own love, loveliness, and preciousness; (2) Our entire and absolute need of Him. The Holy Ghost the effectual agent employed. The instrumental means, the *Word*, however communicated, which reveals Him in what He is in Himself, and what He is to us and has done for us (John xii. 32). Christ draws—(1) By the *Doctrines* He teaches; (2) By the *Promises* He makes; (3) By the *Providences* He employs (Hos. ii. 14; xi. 4; Rom. ii. 4).

3. *The* MOTIVE AND GROUND *of the drawing.* His own free love. He draws with loving-kindness because He has loved with an everlasting love (Jer. xxxi. 3). The bands with which He draws, "the bands of love" (Hos. xi. 4). His love to and choice of us before ours to Him (John xv. 16; 1 John iv. 19).

The *personality* of the request to be noticed. 'Draw me.' Salvation and true religion,—the possession and enjoyment of Christ,—a *personal* thing. The believer's *first* desire is to be drawn himself. 'Remember *me*, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest to Thy people; visit *me* with Thy salvation' (Ps. cvi. 4). We can only be the means of drawing others to Christ when we have been drawn ourselves.

II. *The* RESOLUTION. 'We will run after thee.' The words may indicate—(1) The object of the request; (2) The argument used to enforce it: nothing sweeter to Christ, than a soul ardently following Him; (3) A purpose formed; (4) A hope entertained. Viewed as referring to the speaker, a purpose or resolution; as referring to others, a hope and expectation. Notice—

1. The *Action.* 'Run after thee.' Implies eagerness, earnestness, and haste; rapidity, perseverance, and strength (Isa. xl. 31; Dan. viii. 6). Opposed to former deadness and sluggishness, whether absolute or comparative. Believers, when it is well with them, not content with mere *walking* after Christ. Good to walk, better to run. The Psalmist's resolution (Ps. cxix. 32). The promise of the Father to Christ in regard to the nations (Isa. lv. 5). Not only walking but *running* promised as the result of waiting upon the Lord (Isa. xl. 31). Running, rather than mere walking, pleasing to Christ. Luke-warmness his great dislike (Rev. iii. 15). Christ worthy not only of being followed, but *run* after—followed and sought with the energy of the whole soul. A blind world run after the *creature*; enlightened believers run after *Christ*. Christ first run *to*, then run *after*. Run *to* as a *Saviour*; run *after* as a *Friend* and *Beloved*. We run *to* Him as sinners; *after* Him as *saints*. The believer's duty and privilege not to run *before*, but *after* Christ; not to make a way for himself but to tread in His steps (John x. 4, 5, 27). The *running* ours; the *power* to run, Christ's. Effectual grace consistent with personal diligence, and a strong encouragement to it (Phil. ii. 12, 13; Ps. cx. 3). The request to be drawn not made from indolence but from helplessness. Believers to be not slothful in business—least of all in the business of religion—but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (Rom. xii. 11). Progress always to be made towards Christ and in the Divine life. The Christian life a *running* (1 Cor. ix 24, 25; Gal. ii. 2; iv. 7; Heb. xii. 1, 2; Philip, iii. 13, 14). The believer's feet made like hind's feet. The Word of God made plain, that those that read may run (Hab. ii. 2). Christ to be run after—(1) As our *Chief Joy and Highest Good*. Christ the Desire of all nations, and worthy to be the Desire of all hearts. All in Him that is lovely and desirable; and all lovely and desirable that is in Him. Christ the Fountain of living waters. All else broken cisterns. The language of the soul running after Christ, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none on the earth that I desire besides Thee.' 'There be many that say: who will shew us any good: Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us' (Ps. lxxiii. 25; iv. 6).

> "Thou, O Christ art all I want;
> More than all in Thee I find."

(2) As our *Pattern and Example.* He hath left us an example that we should follow His steps. 'I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you'

(John xiii. 14, 15; 1 Pet. ii. 21). The same mind to be in us that was in Him. The believer to be as He was in the world (Phil. ii. 5; 1 John iv. 17; ii. 6; iii. 3). To run his race, looking unto Jesus (Heb. xii. 3). (3). Our *Leader and Commander*. Christ given for this purpose (Isa. lv. 4). The Captain of our salvation. Believers to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ. The picture of Christ and His saints on the day of His appearing to have its special verification *now*,—Christ as King and General on His white horse, followed by the armies of His people also on white horses (Rev. xix. 12—14). Fulfilled in the calling of the Apostles (Matt. iv. 18—22; Luke v. 27, 28; John i. 43). And of every believer (Matt. xvi 24). 'The sacramental host of God's elect.'

2. The *persons*. '*We* will run after Thee.' The singular changed for the plural. Draw *me: we* will run. We,—I and others with me. *Me*, the individual believer; *we*, he and others influenced by him. Or; *me*, the single believer; *we*, the Church of which he forms a part. Both individuality and plurality in the Bride. The Bride both an individual and a community. The Church one and many. The drawing of one member followed by the running of others; so the Primitive Church at and after Pentecost. The drawing of the woman of Sychar followed by the running of many of the inhabitants (John iv.). The language of a lively believer that of Moses to his father-in-law: 'We are journeying to the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you; come thou with us and we will do thee good' (Num. x. 29). The believer not content to enjoy or follow Christ alone. Andrew finds his brother Simon and brings him to Jesus. Philip, after finding the Saviour himself, does the same with Nathaniel (John i. 40—45). None drawn to follow Christ alone. One drawn by means of another. The believer's duty and privilege to be instrumental in drawing others to Christ; and his great joy to see others running after Him along with himself. The lively Christian a missionary everywhere. The love and life of one believer the means of quickening and stirring up others. On the other hand, one dead Christian often the means of deadening others. One lively member of a Church a blessing to the whole.

Bride's Recorded Experience.

'*The King hath brought me into His chambers.*'

Shulamite recalls and records her experience of the King's kindness and her own happiness. Good to remember and thankfully to record the manifestations of Christ's favour. The Lord's will concerning His people. He hath made His works to be remembered. The believer's duty,—Bless the Lord, O my soul and forget not all His benefits. A gain to ourselves as well as to others, to remember and 'mention the loving kindness of the Lord' (Is. lxiii. 7). The favour in the text recorded apparently as an answer to the prayer: 'Draw me.' Answers to prayer to be especially remembered and mentioned for the Lord's honour, and for the encouragement of others as well as ourselves. Earnest longings and entreaties for spiritual blessings never disregarded. 'The vision is for an appointed time; though it tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, and will not tarry' (Hab. ii. 3).—Observe, in regard to the favour in the text,—introduction into

The King's Chambers,

I. THE CHAMBERS *themselves*. The King's chambers his more private apartments. Admission only for favoured persons, those nearest and dearest to the King. The especial privilege of the King's Betrothed. Shulamite rejoices in being admitted to this high honour. Christ not only makes believers His Bride, but admits them to the privileges of such a relation. Admission into Christ's chambers implies—more than ordinary manifestations of Himself; personal nearness; intimate fellowship; sensible enjoyment; confidential communication. The fulfilment of the promise: 'I will manifest myself to him' (John xiv. 21). The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant (Ps. xxv. 14). The privilege of believers to enter into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus (Heb. x. 19), and to sit with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. ii. 6). Special nearness to Christ and sense of His love at times realized by the believer. Such realisations not confined to time or place; but more usually enjoyed in secret prayer and public ordinances, more especially in the Lord's Supper. Such experiences the believer's high festival days, and foretastes of heaven. Ordinarily for but a short time together. At present, the believer's place in general only the antechamber. Permanent abiding in the King's chambers reserved for a higher and better state. Meantime, the happy privilege of believers to be at times admitted into the King's chambers. No place on earth so honourable and so blessed. No place so humble and unattractive to the eye of sense but grace can convert it into the King's chambers. Jacob's experience on the stony plain at Bethel not confined to local habitation: 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not: This is none other but the

house of God, and this is the gate of heaven' (Gen. xxviii. 16, 17). Such Divine manifestations enjoyed in the humblest dwelling, and even in the chamber of sickness. The field, the wood, the highway, the open sea, capable of being made the King's chambers. John's blessed experience in the lonely rocky isle of Patmos. Samuel Rutherford in exile dated his letters from 'the King's palace at Aberdeen.' John Bunyan wrote his "Pilgrim's Progress" in Bedford Jail. The moors and mosses, caves and mountain sides, often made to His persecuted followers the King's chambers. Admission into these chambers the special privilege of New Testament times. Moses spoke to the Church at the door of the tabernacle; the Apostles speak from the Holy of Holies. Those now waiting at Wisdom's gates admitted into Wisdom's chambers. The three great blessings enjoyed in those chambers,—Comfort, Enlightenment, and Security (Ps. xxv. 13, 14; xxvii. 4—6; Isa. xxvi. 20, 21). The King's chambers on earth so blessed, what the chambers in heaven!

II. Admission *into the chambers.* 'The King hath brought me' (*Heb.*, 'made me come'). Admission into them both the King's favour and the King's doing. An enhancement of the happiness. Believers conscious of their own unworthiness and inability to enter the chambers of Divine communion, and of the Saviour's grace in introducing them. The King brings them—(1) By procuring access through His own merits (Rom. v. 2; Eph. ii. 13, 18; Heb. x. 19). (2) By giving the desire to enter them—'Why was I made to hear thy voice,' &c. (Eph. iv. 18). (3) By encouraging them with His gracious invitations and promises. (4) By imparting faith and inward light (Ps. xliii. 3). (5) By subduing and keeping down corruption,—like Abraham fraying away the fowls from the sacrifice (Gen. xv. 11). Obstacles and hindrances to be overcome in order to our entrance into the King's chambers. Some *outside* of us: Divine justice that forbids it to transgressors; Satan who resists it; the world with its influences against it. Others *within* us: conscious guilt; spiritual blindness; carnality; unbelief; sloth; natural disinclination. These to be overcome and removed by the Saviour's grace.—'The *King* hath brought me.' Marks the forth-putting of especial grace and power. Christ brings sinners into the enjoyment of Divine favour and fellowship *as a King.* The title indicative of His power and right. To introduce sinners into the enjoyment of the blessings He has purchased, one of His kingly acts. As King, He has the keys of His own chambers as well as those of death and hell. The impression of Christ's *kingliness* left on the heart of the believer admitted into His fellowship. A few hours' converse with Jesus in a humble dwelling left John and Andrew with the conviction they had been with Messiah the King (John i. 41). Communion with Christ gives lofty thoughts of Him. Only '*He*' before; now, 'the King.' Christ all the more kingly in a believer's eyes the nearer he gets to Him. So Isaiah: 'Mine eyes have seen the King' (Isa. vi. 5). Divine familiarity the opposite of breeding contempt. Reverence, humility, and obedience, the result of admission into the King's chambers. The experience in those chambers: 'I am a man of unclean lips' (Isa. vi. 5). Believers go forth from them more devoted to the service of the King: 'Here am I, send me' (Isa. vi. 8). Divine power and sovereignty manifest in everything connected with salvation. Christ a King, both in His own right as God, and by Divine appointment as Mediator (Ps. ii. 6). Saves not only as a Priest and a Prophet, but also as a King. Believers, when it is best with them, love most to acknowledge Christ's supremacy and right over all they are and have and do. Christ not only *a* King, but *the* King,—chief of all who ever bore the title; the only one with absolute right to it; 'the blessed and only Potentate, King of Kings and Lord of Lords' (1 Tim. vi. 15). —Observe the *personality* of the experience: 'Hath brought *me.*' Each believer to be able to say this for himself. The language—(1) *Of joy and thankfulness.* What was matter of prayer, now made matter of praise. (2) Of *wonder and surprise.* Shulamite dwells on the King's condescension. Like Mephibosheth when admitted to the King's table,—'such a dead dog as I.' 'Hath brought *me,*'—me so black and unworthy of such an honour and happiness! Amazing condescension and love on the part of the King to admit worms and rebels into His chambers. Every believer a beggar raised by the King from the dunghill, to be made His Bride and the partner of His throne. The believer never to lose sight of what he was, and still is, in himself. (3) Of *consciousness and certainty.* Shulamite certain the King has bestowed on her this privilege. Enjoyment of Christ's presence and fellowship a matter about which there should be no mistake or doubt. Christ's object to make it certain; Satan's, to tempt the believer to question its reality and think it a delusion.

Bride's Joy in the King.

'*We will be glad and rejoice in Thee.*'

Language expressive of Shulamite's happy

experience of the King's chambers, and her high esteem of the King himself. Implies both anticipation and resolution. Observe on the words thus viewed, in regard to the

Believer's Joy in Christ,

I. *The* JOY *itself.* Intense joy. The language emphatic: 'We will be glad and rejoice.' Two words employed for emphasis. Not mere joy, but exultation. Not a mere rejoicing, but a shouting for joy. An inward joy outwardly expressed. A believer's joy in Christ a joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Pet. i. 8). Believers at times in heaviness through manifold temptations; but their experience anything but a gloomy one. The ransomed of the Lord enabled to return to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads (Isa. xxxv. 10). Have joy here, and the hope of more hereafter. 'They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' Cheerfulness and joy disposing to praise, both the privilege and duty of believers. Sadness in the presence of an Oriental monarch an offence to the sovereign and a peril to the subject (Neh. ii. 1, 2). God graciously meets those that rejoice while they remember Him in His ways (Isa. lxvi. 5).

II. *The* OBJECT *of the joy.* Christ himself. We will be glad and rejoice *in Thee.* Not in the creature and its attractions; not in the world and its pleasures; not in self and its doings or feelings. Christ and God in him the object of truest and highest joy. The duty and privilege of believers, both in the Old and New Testament, to rejoice in the Lord (Ps. xxxiii. 1; Phil. iii. 1). Enough in God to fill a universe of intelligent creatures, and enough in Christ to fill a world of believing sinners, with joy unspeakable. Christ opens up sources of joy outside of Himself; but the deep and living fountain is in Himself. The Psalmist's words especially true of Christ: 'All my springs are in Thee' (Ps. lxxxvii. 7). In Him are both 'the upper and the nether springs,'—the joy of the Church triumphant in heaven, and of the Church militant on earth. All the attractions and charms in the creature concentrated and summed up in Him, the Creator and Saviour. In Him all love and loveliness, all sweetness and excellence, in their perfection and without alloy. Believers able to rejoice in Christ not only as their Redeemer and Saviour, but as their Beloved and Bridegroom (Matt. ix. 15). To a renewed soul, everything in Jesus such as to afford matter of joy,—His person, names, titles, offices, relations, work; His birth, life, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension, second coming; His miracles, discourses, doctrines, promises, precepts, warnings; His word, worship, day, table, people, cause; His salvation, grace, kingdom, fellowship, love; His blood that washes them, His righteousness that clothes them, His spirit that anoints and sanctifies them, and His ordinances that comfort and strengthen them. In His present salvation they rejoice; still more in that which is to be revealed at His coming. In His *salvation* they rejoice; still more in *Himself.* Good to have and enjoy the King's gifts; still better to have and enjoy the King himself. Thy gifts precious; but 'We will be glad and rejoice in *Thee.*' Joy in an *unseen* Christ unspeakable; what then in a *seen* one?

The text the language of *resolution.* 'We *will* be glad.' The duty of believers to rejoice in Christ, and to resolve by Divine grace to do so. Especially on any fresh enjoyment of His presence and love. Holy resolution the fruit of Divine grace, and to be freely made in dependance on it. Need of resolution. Much to oppose such rejoicing: remembered sin; inward corruption; buffetings of Satan; outward trials. These not to hinder rejoicing in the Lord. 'Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, &c., yet will I rejoice in the Lord,' &c. (Hab. iii. 17, 18). Joy in Christ often greatest when joy from the creature is least (Hos. ii. 14; 2 Cor. i. 5).

The language of *faith and hope.* The same ground of rejoicing in the future as in the past. Christ a well that never runs dry. The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. 'Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us' (2 Cor. i. 10). 'Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice' (Ps. lxiii. 7).

Observe the *party* who shall rejoice. '*We* will be glad and rejoice in Thee.' Another change from the singular to the plural. 'The King hath brought me, &c.; *we* will be glad, &c. The Bride herself, and others along with her. The believer speaks for himself and his fellow-believers. The joy of one to become the joy of many. The part of believers to rejoice with them that rejoice. The body of Christ one with many members. 'If one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it' (1 Cor. xii. 26). One believer rejoicing in the presence and love of Jesus, the means of influencing others to seek and obtain the same happiness. Man a social being. Inclined to act in numbers. One constantly influenced by another. Sympathy a powerful principle in man's nature. Its operation in revivals of religion. Employed by the Spirit in the great advancement

of Christ's Kingdom (Zech. viii. 20—23; Isa. ii. 3; Mic. iv. 1, 2).

Bride's Gratitude to the King.

'We will remember Thy love more than wine.'

Shulamite resolves not only to rejoice in the King himself, but to cherish a grateful remembrance of his love. "We will remember (or record) thy love (or loves—loving words and actions) more than wine." Probably a double resolution—to remember inwardly for herself, and to record outwardly for others; both to the praise of her loving Bridegroom. One of the duties and delights of believers, the

Remembrance of Christ's Love.

Observe in regard to it—

I. *The* LOVE *remembered. Heb.* 'Loves,'—for the greatness of it, or the variety of its kinds, and the multiplicity of its manifestations. Christ's love to His people that of a Saviour to the lost, a Redeemer to the captive, a Shepherd to his sheep, a Husband to his wife, a Brother to his brethren, a Father to his children, a Friend to his intimate acquaintances. Its various manifestations—

1. Offering Himself for our redemption in the everlasting covenant (Ps. xl. 7).

2. Revealing himself to the Old Testament Church in types and symbols, prophecies and promises.

3. Assuming our nature in the fulness of time.

4. His teachings and labours of love during His life on earth.

5. His sufferings and death as the atonement for our sins.

6 His return to heaven to carry forward the work of our salvation.

7. His subsequent bestowment of the Holy Spirit with all needful grace and blessing.

8. His gathering in lost sinners to Himself through His Word and Spirit.

9. His speaking peace and comfort to the awakened and troubled conscience.

10. His restoring the believer from his falls and backslidings.

11. His gladdening the soul with His manifested presence and love.

12. His gracious promises to come again and receive His people to Himself for ever.

Christ's love infinitely worthy to be remembered and celebrated through time and eternity; on account of—

1. Its *greatness.* 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (John xv. 13). Christ's love greater than this; as—(1) He did more than lay down His life for us; (2) He did it not for friends, but enemies. Jonathan's love to David, 'wonderful, passing the love of women' (2 Sam. i. 26). Jonathan's love only a faint picture of Christ's.

2. Its *costliness.* 'Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it' (Eph. v. 25). The love of Ahasuerus to Esther his queen extended to the gift of half his kingdom (Est. v. 3). Christ's love to His people extended not only to the gift of His *whole* kingdom, but of *Himself* (Matt. xx. 28).

3. Its *fruits.* Deliverance from sin, death, and hell, with perfection in holiness and the enjoyment of Himself in glory everlasting. 'That He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water, by the word; that He might present it unto Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish' (Eph. v. 26).

II. *The* REMEMBRANCE *of it.* The remembrance of Christ's love on the part of believers: (1) A Duty; (2) A Delight; (3) A Necessity. Proceeds—(1) From a sense of duty; (2) From the impression of its sweetness. Christ's love remembered when all else is forgotten. Its remembrance brings—(1) Glory to Christ; (2) Benefit to our neighbour; (3) Comfort and quickening to ourselves. Its remembrance our sweetest cordial in the time of trouble (Psalm xlii. 6). Assures us afresh of our interest in Christ, and casts out slavish fear. Revives our love to Him, and stimulates to do and suffer for His sake. His love not remembered and recorded as a thing past and gone for ever; but one of unchanging continuance and ever fresh manifestation. An everlasting love. Helps to remembering it are—

1. Daily reading of the Word, with meditation and prayer; especially such portions of it as bear expressly upon Christ and His love. For example: the Gospels and Canticles; Isaiah liii.; Psalm xxii. &c.

2. Careful observance of the Sabbath, with suitable meditation on His death and resurrection, which it was designed to commemorate.

3. Frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper, designed for the express purpose of keeping Himself and His dying love in remembrance.

4. Fellowship with living and loving believers. 'As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man the face of his friend.' 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another.' 'Provoke one another to love and good works.'

III. *The* DEGREE *of Remembrance.* 'More than wine.' The love better than wine (verse 2), and therefore more remembered.

Wine mentioned as a natural means of gladness and refreshing (Jud. ix. 13; Ps. civ. 15). Associated with festivity—'banquet of wine.' Here put for all earth's choicest pleasures and sensuous enjoyments. To Shulamite, her bridegroom's love more worthy to be remembered than everything besides. 'Sweet is the King's wine, but sweeter his love.' All Christ's gifts sweet, and all His benefits to be remembered; but sweeter and more to be remembered than all is His love. Its sweetness sufficient to obliterate the remembrance of all other joy. Christ's love the absorbing subject as the believer approaches the confines of eternity. Earth's lawful enjoyments perhaps not forgotten in heaven; but the love of Christ the chosen and overshadowing subject of ever-new songs (Rev. i. 5; v. 9, 12, 13; xiv. 3).

The text the language of *resolution*. 'We *will* remember,' &c. Such resolution needed. The flesh adverse to such remembrance. Satan's object to efface or weaken it. The tendency of earthly things to prevent or deaden it. David's language in reference to Jerusalem applicable to Christ's love: "If I forget thee, let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not thee above my chiefest joy (Ps. cxxxvii. 5, 6).

Bride Commends her Beloved and Justifies her Love.

'The upright love thee.'

May be either read—'Upright people love thee;' or, 'Rightly do people love thee.' Mentioned by Shulamite as an enhancement of her Beloved's excellence, and a justification of her own love. Similar to verse 3. Indicates the character both of Christ himself and

Christ's Lovers.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO LOVE CHRIST. 'The upright;'—sincere, true, just, pure in heart and life. Such as Simeon of Jerusalem; Joseph the carpenter; Joseph of Arimathæa; Nathaniel, 'an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile.' Christ Himself, 'that Just One;' God's 'righteous servant;' 'Jesus Christ the Righteous,' who loves righteousness and hates iniquity; 'holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.' Naturally loved by persons of a similar character, and only by such. A holy Christ capable of being loved only by holy persons, or such at least as, conscious of their sins, desire to be holy. Like naturally loves and draws to like. Hence Christ only loved by converted and renewed persons. Love to God's Christ a holy and spiritual thing. A plant not spontaneously growing among the noxious weeds of Nature's garden, but produced by the Holy Ghost in a renewed heart. Found only in those who have passed from death to life; who were afar off, but have been made nigh by the blood of Christ; who were lost, but are found; who as believing and pardoned sinners 'have tasted that the Lord is gracious' (1 Pet. ii. 3; 1 John iv. 19). The forgiven woman that had been a sinner, loved Jesus, who had forgiven her sins, which were many, and for which she now lovingly weeps at His feet. The proud, self-righteous, merely outwardly religious Pharisee, incapable of such love. 'He to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little' (Luke vii. 47). A sinner may love Christ, but not a Pharisee (Luke xv. 1, 2). Upright persons love Christ, because by His blood shed for them, and His spirit given to them, He has made them upright. When He forgives a sinner He makes him upright. The heart purified by faith. All upright who love Christ in sincerity. Others only pretenders. True love to Christ sufficient to prove a man upright. 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' On the other hand, a man's love to Christ proved by his uprightness. 'If ye love me keep my commandments. If a man love Me, he will keep My words' (John xiv. 15, 23). Hence those worthy to be 'accursed' who do not love Christ. They are not upright, and they refuse Him who would make them so.

II. THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST HIMSELF. The text a commendation of the Beloved. He must be excellent and upright who is loved by upright persons. A man's character indicated by the character of his friends. A high commendation of the character of Christ—(1) That He is loved by all the honest and best in creation—by all holy angels and holy men; (2) That He is loved only by the holy and upright

III. THE CHARACTER OF LOVE TO CHRIST. It is—(1) A *holy* thing; only upright persons possess it; (2) A *right* and *reasonable* thing. Upright persons only love uprightly—on just grounds and considerations. Just grounds for loving Christ—(1) In what He is; (2) In what He has done. Christ infinitely worthy of angelic, still more of human, love. Is infinitely excellent in Himself; has been infinitely kind to us. As God, possessed of all the infinite amiableness of the Divine perfections; and, as our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, has an infinite right to our love. That right enhanced by the fact that, as God-man for our sakes, He has become also our Redeemer. Robbery committed

when Christ is not loved; idolatry, when others are loved in His place. 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha,'—accursed [when] the Lord cometh (1 Cor. xvi. 22).

The text a test of character. Do I love Christ? If not, then I am not upright. I do not love uprightness; for Christ is uprightness itself. I rob Him of what He has the most perfect right to, and of what He sets the highest value on—my love. Hence my need both of mercy and grace; of mercy to pardon, and of grace to renew me. Lord, grant both.

Shulamith,

TO THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM, OR LADIES OF SOLOMON'S COURT.

Gives an Account of herself in justification of her presence in the King's Chambers.

Verses 5, 6.

I am black,
But comely,
O ye daughters of Jerusalem;
As the tents of Kedar,
As the curtains of Solomon.

Look not upon me,
Because I am black,
Because the sun hath looked upon me.
My mother's children were angry with me;
They made me keeper of the vineyards;
But mine own vineyard have I not kept.

Shulamite, in the Allegory, originally a rustic damsel, employed by her brothers in watching the vineyards. Though thus tanned and discoloured by the sun, yet not uncomely in herself, and therefore not to be despised by the ladies of the court. The words indicate the believer's twofold character, and the reason of it.

The Christian Paradox.

"I am black, but comely."

Shulamite, black or tawny in complexion from the reason given; but comely in feature and proportion. Swarthy, as the coarse tents of Kedar or Arabia, made of dark coloured goats' or camels' hair, and farther blackened by exposure to the sun and rain (Isa. xxi. 13, 17; xlii. 11; Ez. xxvii. 21; Ps. cxx. 5, 6). Comely, as the beautiful embroidered hangings of Solomon's palace (Eccles. ii. 4—8; Esth. i. 5, 6).

Hence observe—

I. *Dark side of the Paradox.*—'I am black.' The believer black—

1. *With sin.* In common with others, the believer blackened—(1) With *original* sin; (2) With *actual* transgression. The character of sin to make men black. Sin black in itself, and blackens those who carry it in their nature and commit it in their life. Black, as contrary to the nature and will of God, who is Light. The least sin in a believer like a dark spot on the sun's disk. Sin pervading our whole nature renders us moral Ethiopians. Man, originally created 'upright,' made black by the Fall (Eccles. vii. 29; Rom. v. 12—19). Black with sin, both original and actual, now the character of the human race (Gen. vi. 5; viii. 21; 2 Chron. vi. 36; Prov. xx. 9; Ps. xiv. 1—3; Rom. iii. 9—19, 23; James ii. 10; iii. 2; 1 John i. 8). The experience and confession of David (Ps. li. 5). The teaching of Christ (John iii. 5—7). Observe—(1) *The believer black through inbred corruption and daily transgressions, even while in Christ and enjoying His love.* A law in his members warring against the law of his mind (Rom. vii. 23). Peter's fall immediately after the feast. The believer carries his blackness into the King's chambers. Good to remember and confess it in the midst of his spiritual enjoyments. 'Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged' (Isa. li., 1). (2) *The believer not only black, but conscious of it.* The great distinction between him and others. Others as black as he; but he alone sees and feels his blackness. (3) *The believer not afraid to acknowledge that he is black.* His safety and comfort not in his not being black, or less black than others; but in his being comely in Christ, and washed in His blood. His sense of blackness, therefore, no hindrance to his rejoicing in Christ, but rather a help to it. Confession of blackness part of our rejoicing in Christ's comeliness. The blacker we are in our own eyes, the more precious is Christ (2 Cor. xii. 8—10). (4) *The confession, 'I am black,' often the turning point in a soul's history.* Paul's experience at Damascus (Acts ix. 1—18; Rom. vii. 9). That of Isaiah in the temple (Isa. vi. 5—8). Never comely till we realize we are 'black.' (5) *Our whole nature black.* I,—not a part of me; the whole natural man; the 'me' and 'I' of the Apostle. 'In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. I am carnal, and sold under sin' (Rom. vii. 14, 17). (6) *Believers always black with sin while in this world.* Times when the believer may be without suffering; no time when he is without sin.

2. *With suffering.* Suffering and grief blacken us as well as sin (Jer. viii. 21; Lam.

. 8; Ps. cxix. 83). Like others, the believer, while in this world, black with suffering as well as with sin. Sin draws suffering with it as its dark shadow. Believers no exception to this law. That believers have suffering, no more to be concealed than that they have sin. The difference between them and other men, not that they have less suffering, but that they have more comfort and better hope. The testimony of Scripture and the experience of believers, that 'many are the afflictions of the righteous,' and that 'through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom.' Believers, though having the first-fruits of the Spirit, yet groan within themselves (Rom. viii. 23). Groan, being burdened (2 Cor. v. 2). Believers not only not exempt from grief and suffering in this life, but have naturally a large share of it. Their sufferings partly such as are common to men; partly, peculiar to themselves as believers. Various causes of their suffering. (1) *The love of their Father*, who chastens them for their profit, to make them partakers of His own holiness (Heb. xii. 6—11). (2) *The hatred of the world*, which persecutes the members as it did the Head (John xv. 18—21; xvii, 14; 2 Tim. iii. 12). (3) *The temptations of Satan*, acting both directly on the mind himself, and indirectly through the agency of others (2 Cor. xii. 7; 1 Pet. v. 9; Rev. ii. 10). (4) *Indwelling sin*, or the body of sin and death which we carry with us, occasioning a constant warfare within, and often extorting the cry, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' (Rom. vii. 23, 24; Gal. v. 17; James iv. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 11). (5) *The sins and sufferings of others*, as well of their own brethren as of the unconverted; these often awakening the cry of the prophet: 'O that my head were waters,' &c. (Jer. ix. 1; viii. 21; 1 Cor. xii. 26; 2 Cor. xi. 29; Rom. xii. 15). (6) *Faithful and self-denying efforts for the spiritual and eternal benefit of others;* thus filling up in their flesh that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ for His body's sake, the Church (Col. i. 24; 2 Cor. xi. 23—28). Believers, having the Spirit of Christ, suffer in seeking to save others, and grieve to see so many remain unsaved.

II. Bright *side of the Paradox.* 'But comely.' The Bride, notwithstanding external blackness, 'all glorious within' (Ps. xlv. 14). Shulamite's comeliness rather that of the soul, which lighted up and gave a charming expression to her swarthy features. Believers' comeliness that 'in the hidden man of the heart,' and diffusing a spiritual beauty over the life. Believers comely—

1. Through *imputed righteousness.* Comely through the comeliness of their Head and Saviour put upon them (Ezek. xvi. 14). Believers made the Righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor. v. 21). Made accepted in the Beloved (Eph. i. 6). Christ made righteousness to those who are in Him (1 Cor. i. 30). The language of faith: 'In the Lord have I righteousness' (Is. xlv. 24). The name by which the promised Saviour was to be called: The Lord our Righteousness (Jer. xxiii. 6). The guests at the King's marriage-supper accepted not in their own garments, but in those provided for and given to them by the King Himself (Matt. xxii. 11, 12). Paul's desire to be found not in his own righteousness which was by the law, but that which was 'through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith' (Phil. iii. 9). Believers, like Jacob, blessed in the garments of their Elder Brother (Gen. xxvii. 15, 27). Men made sinners by one man's disobedience; made righteous by the obedience of another (Rom. v. 19).

2. Through *imparted holiness.* Believers saved and made comely as well by *impartation* as by *imputation;* made *personally holy* by the one, as they are made *legally righteous* by the other. Made righteous in our Representative, we are made holy in our own persons. Christ made to us 'sanctification,' as well as 'righteousness' (1 Cor. i. 30). Faith says: 'In the Lord I have righteousness and *strength*,'—the latter for personal holiness, as the former for acceptance with God (Is. xlv. 24). Believers clothed with 'the beauty of holiness,' as well as with the 'robe of righteousness.' Made to put on Christ in His spirit and character, as well as in His Surety righteousness. Renewed in the image of God, and conformed to the likeness of His Son. Made one with Christ, they possess His Spirit, and live because He lives in them (Gal. ii. 20). Sanctified as well as justified in Him (1 Cor. i. 2). Christ our Life, as well as our Peace and Hope. 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His' (Rom. viii. 9). Believers chosen and blessed by the Father in Christ, in order to be holy and without blame before Him in love (Eph. i. 4). Predestinated by Him to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. viii. 29). Redeemed by Christ to be sanctified and cleansed, and so presented to Himself a glorious Church, holy and without blemish (Eph. v. 25—27). Believers accepted in Christ without any holiness; but accepted in order to their being made holy.

III. *The* Combination *of the two.* The believer, like Shulamite, at once black and comely. The paradox: Black and yet comely. Comely while yet black. The explanation: Believers black in themselves,

comely in Christ; black by nature, comely by grace; black in the flesh or old man in them; comely in the spirit or new man. Believers carry in them two natures at once,—the flesh and the spirit, the old man and the new. Like Rebekah, with two nations in her womb. The elder, or old carnal nature, to serve the younger, or the new and spiritual one. In the believer, with his twofold nature of flesh and spirit lusting and warring against each other, is seen 'the company of two armies.' Hence both inward conflict and outward incongruities. The believer both a saint and a sinner. Has in him the roots of all sin, and the principles of all holiness. Hence the believer's frequent doubts and disquietude about his spiritual condition. The question natural to the inexperienced Christian: If I am a child of God, why am I thus? A part of spiritual wisdom to know that we can be, and that, if believers, we actually are, both black and comely at the same time. Not less black in ourselves because comely in Christ; and not less comely in Christ because black in ourselves. Believers often black outwardly in respect to condition and circumstances, when comely inwardly in respect to character and affections. Black like their Master, in the eyes of the world; comely in the eyes of God. Black in suffering; comely in the patience and meekness with which they endure it.—Observe—

1. *Believers to be as conscious of their comeliness in Christ, as of their blackness in themselves.* Our duty to know ourselves, that Christ is in us; and that while black in ourselves, we are comely in Him. Hence both the believer's humility and joy.

2. *Our duty and privilege to confess both our blackness and our comeliness.* Grace not to be denied while blackness is acknowledged. To see and confess ourselves at once black and comely—black in ourselves and comely in Christ—the mark of a believer. Pride forbids both.

3. *Our comeliness to attract and convince the world, more than our blackness might offend and deter them.* The excellence of Christ and His Gospel seen in the comeliness of believers, notwithstanding their blackness. Believers to seek that others may think highly of Christ on their account, and rejoice in Him along with them. The world and weak professors apt to stumble at the blackness in believers, as seen in their sufferings, and especially in their sins. More power in their comeliness to attract, than in their blackness to repel. Believers more to be envied for their comeliness than despised for their blackness.

4. *Much in the believer and the spiritual life mysterious and incomprehensible to the world.* Apparent contradictions: black, yet comely; 'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich.' Strange in the eyes of natural reason that the children of God should be black at all; still more, that they should be comely at the same time. Yet natural—(1) That the Bride of the Man of Sorrows should be also for a short time a sufferer, and that the Wife of the Persecuted One should herself be persecuted; (2) That the blackness of her own fallen nature should not be all at once removed, but allowed for wise and important purposes in part to remain till the Bridegroom comes and takes her to Himself. The blackness daily passing away; the comeliness ever increasing. The blackness carried only till death; the comeliness perfected in the New Jerusalem.

5. *The glory of the work of Christ and of the grace of God, that those who are 'black' are thereby rendered 'comely.'* Our blackness in respect to suffering assumed by the Surety, that we might have His comeliness put upon us. That comeliness imparted in regeneration and conversion. 'Even when we were dead in sins, hath He quickened us together with Christ (by grace are ye saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' 'Neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God: and such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God' (Eph. ii. 5, 6; 1 Cor. vi. 9—11; read also Titus iii. 3—7).

Notice the PARTY ADDRESSED.

'O ye daughters of Jerusalem.'

These, in the Allegory probably the ladies of Solomon's court, now present with Shulamite in the King's chambers. Now addressed by the rustic Stranger who has just been introduced among them. The probable representatives—(1) Of the professing Church; (2) Of persons only partially or carnally acquainted with Christ. Charged not to disturb the Beloved One's rest (chap. ii. 7). Connected in some way with the marriage of the King and Shulamite (chap. iii. 10). Supposed to have some knowledge of the Bridegroom, though not possessing Him as their own (chap. v. 8). Made desirous to learn more about Him, and to seek Him with the Bride (chap. vi. 1). Becomes interested in the Bride, and admires her beauty (chap. vi. 13). The women of Jerusalem who followed Jesus to Calvary,

called by this name; with a probable reference to the term in the text, and indicating the connection of the Song with the Gospel history, and the identity of the Bridegroom with Christ. Observe, in reference to—

The Visible Church.

1. Possible to be near Christ and yet not to belong to Him; to have a knowledge of the Saviour, but not a saving one; to have a place in Christ's House, and yet not to be Christ's Bride.

2. The duty of believers to have regard to the spiritual welfare of the unconverted in the visible Church, and to seek their salvation.

3. Believers to be careful to remove all stumbling-blocks out of the way of the Church's unsaved members, especially such as are in themselves.

4. Young believers to regard the members of the visible Church with charity, and to treat them with deference and respect.

5. Believers to be able and willing, humbly and for edification, to declare, especially to the members of the Church, their spiritual standing and condition in Christ.

APPEAL AND EXPLANATION.

"*Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked* (or glanced) *upon me* (to scorch me); *my mother's children were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards: but mine own vineyard have I not kept*" (Verse 6).

Shulamite begs the ladies of the court not to gaze upon her with such prying eyes, nor yet to regard her with disdain, or be offended on account of her swarthy complexion; a dusky hue being a mark of inferior condition among Eastern females. She intimates the cause of her blackness—exposure to the sun whilst fulfilling a rural task imposed on her by hostile relatives under whose control she had been,—unmarried females in the East being under the guardianship of older male relations; and whilst watching the vineyards during the summer while the fruit was ripening,—a work which could easily be done by a young female, though both menial in itself and injurious to her complexion. This last circumstance perhaps figurately alluded to in the concluding clause of the verse: 'Mine own vineyard'—my own interest, or what concerned my own person, namely, my complexion—'I have not kept,' or attended to. Or perhaps emphasizing the circumstance that it was in attending to the vineyards of others,—and not to her own,—and therefore unwillingly and by constraint,—that her otherwise fair countenance had become thus discoloured. Observe—

1. The condition of believers on earth, whether as one of sin or suffering, no just cause of offence to others; their sin being the result of a corrupt nature inherited from their first parents, and their suffering being partly the necessary consequence of that sin, and partly from the hostility of their unrenewed brethren (Rom. v. 12, 19; vii. 15, 19; John xv. 18, 20; xvi. 2; 1 Pet. i. 6).

2. Men of the world and unrenewed Church members apt to look more on believers' blemishes than on their beauty.

3. Believers, like Christ Himself, often, through men's sin, a stumbling-stone and rock of offence to others; partly from their unavoidable imperfections, and partly from their constrained sufferings. Chosen out of the world, and therefore made an offence to it. Sharers of Christ's cross, and, therefore, of its offence (Gal. iv. 11; Heb. xiii. 12, 13).

4. The duty and desire of believers to remove as far as possible all occasions of stumbling from the way of others; and to guard them against stumbling at what must necessarily exist. Paul's exhortation to believers: 'Give none offence, neither to the Jew, nor to the Gentile, nor to the Church of God' (1 Cor. x. 32; viii. 9; Rom. xiv. 13). His own resolution: 'If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend' (1 Cor. viii. 13). His anxiety in respect to his sufferings: 'I desire that ye faint not at my tribulation for you.' 'That no man should be moved by these afflictions, for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto (Eph. iii. 13; 1 Thess. iii. 3).

5. Connection with Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, sure to blacken us; as—(1) Discovering to us our own corruption; (2) Exposing us to persecution and tribulation from the world (John xvi. 2, 33).

6. Our "mother's children," whether naturally or ecclesiastically, not always the children of our heavenly Father, or the Bride of His Son (Rom. ix, 6—8; Gal. iv. 22—31; John vii. 5).

7. No uncommon thing for believers to experience the anger and persecution of their 'mother's children' (Is. lxvi. 5; Matt. x. 21, 35, 36).

8. A sinning and suffering condition in this world, a necessity laid upon believers in common with others in consequence of the Fall. All men, believers included, children of wrath by nature, as well as children of disobedience (Eph. ii. 2, 3). The creature made subject to vanity not willingly (Rom viii. 20)

9. The duty of each to be careful in looking to the interests of his own soul. Each man's soul his own vineyard given him by his Creator to keep (Prov. iv. 23). Loss of spiritual beauty the result of negligence and unwatchfulness (Prov. xxiv. 30—34). Ministers, while keeping the vineyard of others, to be especially careful to keep their own (1 Cor. ix. 27).

10. The part of a believer to look to the interests of others as well as, and to a certain extent, beyond his own. 'I seek not mine profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.' 'Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth' (or welfare). 'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others: let this mind be in you which was also in Christ, (1 Cor. x. 2, 33; Phil. ii. 4, 5). True ministers the servants of others for Jesus' sake (2 Cor. iv. 5). Self-forgetting love one mark of the the Bride of Jesus Christ.

Bride's Third Request of her Beloved.

Shulamite again addresses herself to the King, though still out of sight.

VERSE 7.

Tell me,
O thou whom my soul loveth,
Where thou feedest,
Where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon.
For why should I be as one that turneth aside
By the flocks of thy companions.

The *third* petition which Shulamite has already addressed to her absent Bridegroom. A believer's life a life of prayer. A living soul *must* pray. He has wants, and *feels* them. Has longings, and one to tell them to. An earnest, loving Christian has *many* petitions, and has boldness in presenting them. The King's golden sceptre held out with—'What is thy petition, and what is thy request? and it shall be done unto thee' (Esther v. 2, 3).

Shulamite still longs for the Beloved's presence and fellowship. The chambers of the King not sufficient without the King himself. The Bride anxious to know where her Bridegroom is, in order to be with him. Addresses him as if he were present. Ardent love communes with its object though absent and unseen. The interview between a longing soul and a loving Saviour maintained through a thin veil. Bodily bsence no hindrance to communion with Christ. The loving soul must unbosom its feelings to the Beloved, whether present or absent. Good to turn from even professing Christians to Christ Himself. The daughters of Jerusalem unable to take the place of Jerusalem's King. Ordinances good, and Christian fellowship good; but neither of them anything without Christ himself.

The ground of Shulamite's longing given in the title with which she addresses her absent Beloved:

'O thou whom my soul loveth.'

Love unable to rest without the presence of its object. The language expressive both of the *sincerity* and the *ardour* of her affection. The believer's love to Christ a love of the *'soul,'*—deep down in the heart, and engaging all its affections. Christ to be loved *with* all and *above* all (Matt. x. 37; Luke xiv. 20). Jesus locked in the believer's heart as its most precious treasure. Infinitely worthy of such affection—(1) From His own loveliness; (2) From His love. In regard to believers, Christ's love that of a *Bridegroom*, who has—(1) Loved them; (2) Given His own life for them; (3) Wooed and won them; (4) Lavished the expressions of His love upon them (Eph. v. 24—30). The believer's love to Christ therefore that of a *Bride*. Christ in His loveliness and love, more than sufficient to attract and engage all our affection, if we possessed a thousand hearts instead of one. The believer's

Love to Christ

is—(1) *Divine in its origin;* produced by the Holy Spirit in a renewed heart. (2) *Unquenchable in its character:* survives all trials, sufferings, and discouragements. (3) *Discoverable in its effects:* leading to—(i.) Obedience; (ii.) Self-dedication; (iii.) Desire of fellowship; (iv.) Love and esteem for all that is His. True and hearty love to Jesus the distinguishing mark of a genuine Christian. The contrast of this in 1 Cor. xvi. 22. Believers conscious, or ought to be, that they love Christ. Shulamite's language that of unquestioning certainty. So Peter, even after his fall: 'Yea, Lord; Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee' (John xxi.). The Church's language in the lips of the prophet: 'The desire of our soul is to Thy name and to the remembrance of Thee' (Isa. xxvi. 8). True of all believers: 'Whom, having not seen, ye love' (1 Pet. i. 8). Observe—

1. *Our comfort in darkness and assertion, to know that we love Jesus.*

2. *Consciousness and confession of blackness, in perfect harmony with love to Christ.* Peter's thrice repeated declaration of love to his Master consistent with his thrice repeated,

but afterwards deeply repented of, denial of Him. Love greatest where most is forgiven.

3. *Love to Christ a plea for the enjoyment of His presence.* Acknowledged by Christ Himself: 'He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him' (John xiv. 21).

In regard to the request in the text, observe—

I. *The* PETITION *itself.* 'Tell me where thou feedest,' &c. A desire for *information.* Implies *ignorance.* Believers while in this world, ignorant of many things pertaining to Christ's ways and their own comfort. 'Now we know in part.' Our happiness to be able to go to Christ for light and instruction. Christ made 'wisdom' to us, as well as righteousness and sanctification. Believers not only weak, and needing to be *drawn,* but erring, and needing to be *directed.* Wells of refreshment in the Word not seen till Jesus reveals them. Christ found in the Word and ordinances only as He is pleased to discover Himself. Himself our best Guide and Teacher.

Shulamite desires to know where her Beloved 'feeds and rests his flocks at noon.' Scripture often represents

Christ as a Shepherd.

He is: (1) Jehovah's Shepherd; chosen by the Father to feed and save his people. 'My shepherd' (Zech. xiii. 7). 'I will set up one shepherd over them' (Ezek. xxxiv. 23). (2) *The Good Shepherd:* good especially in 'giving his life for the sheep' (John x. 11). (3) *The Great Shepherd:* being the Almighty, 'and able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him' (Heb. xiii. 20). (4) *The Chief Shepherd:* in distinction from all other shepherds, who, as teachers and rulers of the Church, are employed under Him in promoting the welfare of the sheep (1 Peter v. 4). (5) *The One Shepherd:* the sheep being only His, and no under-shepherd being to be compared with him (Ezek. xxxiv. 23; Eccles. xii. 11).

As a Shepherd Christ has—

His Flock.

These are—(1) Given Him by the Father (John x. 29; xvii. 2, 6); (2) Redeemed by His own blood; (3) Sought and found by Himself while straying in the wilderness; (4) Called by His grace; (5) Quickened by His Spirit; (6) Kept and preserved by His power; (7) Cared for and tended by His love. Hitherto, as compared with the world, a 'little flock' (Luke xii. 32). Always a 'beautiful flock' (Jer. xiii 20). Frequently a 'flock of slaughter' (Zech. xi. 4, 7; Ps. xliv. 22; Rom. viii. 36). Known from their —(1) Hearing His voice and obeying His call; (2) Following Him through bad and good report even to the end; (3) Avoiding and refusing to follow a stranger. Enjoy the privilege of being—(1) Led by Christ as their Shepherd; (2) Guarded by Him from all real evil and from every hurtful foe; (3) Helped, supported, and even carried by Him; (Is. xl. 11; xlvi. 4; lxiii. 9; Luke xv. 5; (4) Fed, sustained, and comforted by Him till they reach their home in heaven (Ps. xxiii. 1—6).

Two actions here ascribed to Christ as the Shepherd:—

1. He *feeds* His flock. Believers require spiritual food. Living souls must be fed Such *feel* their need of nourishment. Hunger and thirst for it. Desire what may inwardly satisfy them and enable them to grow in knowledge, faith love, and every grace. Must be fed by Christ Himself. Willing to go anywhere where He feeds His flock, however plain the place, and poor the people, and painful the effort to reach them. Christ feeds them—(1) With *His Word,* which is made 'the joy and rejoicing of their heart;' (2) With *His ordinances,* in which he makes them to lie down as 'in green pastures;' (3) With *Himself,* the Hidden Manna and Bread of Life, whose 'flesh is meat indeed, and His blood drink indeed.'

2. *He makes them to rest at noon.* Noon the time of oppressive heat,—'the burden and heat of the day.' Expressive of the time of —(1) Temptation (2) Trouble; (3) Persecution (Matt. xiii. 5, 6, 20, 21; 1 Pet. iv. 12). Believers often in such circumstances (1 Pet i. 6; 2 Tim. iii. 12; John xvi. 33). Therefore require rest and comfort, as well as food. Christ therefore *rests* His flock as well as *feeds* it. Able to make them 'rejoice in tribulation.' Speaks comfortably (or 'to their heart') in the wilderness (Hos. ii. 14). Gives them rest and comfort—(1) By the promises of His Word; (2) By the doctrines of His grace; (3) By the ordinances of His house; (4) By the dealings of His Providence; (5) By the consolations of His Spirit; (6) By the fellowship of His people; (7) By the manifestation of Himself. Christ the Rest of His people as well as their Food. 'The shadow of a great rock in a weary land' (Is. xxxii. 2). Exemplified in the case of Churches in Acts ix. 31. Typified in the rest given at times to Israel (Jud. v. 31; 1 Kings iv. 24, 25). The Bride's desire to be *rested* as well as *fed* by Christ along with his flock. Believers desire to be rested—(1) *By Christ Himself.* The world seek rest and comfort in the creature. Believers choose rather to

suffer with Christ than to reign with the world. (2) *Among His people.* 'Where Thou makest Thy flock to rest.' Christ found where His flock is, and where He is feeding and resting them (Mat. xviii. 20).

Shulamite, while desiring to be rested by the shepherd along with His flock, probably speaks in the character of a shepherdess, wishing to feed her kids where her Beloved is feeding his sheep. Even the under-shepherds need to be fed and rested by Christ Himself. The labourer for Christ to keep near to Christ even in his labour. Best to feed our kids where Christ is feeding His flock. Whether toiling or resting, the believer's place is to be near the Master.

II. *The* REASON *for the Petition.* 'For, why should I be as one that turneth aside (or, is veiled, either as a mourner or an immodest woman) by the flocks of thy companions.' Observe—

1. *Unlike the Bride of Christ to be living without His presence and society.* Natural to believers to have the presence of Christ and to be happy in it. Not to Christ's honour that His bride should go mourning without Him, or turning aside to others for comfort.

2. *The Bride of Christ in danger of turning aside, if without Christ's presence.* Believers justly afraid of turning aside from Christ to the flocks of His under shepherds, or even of wandering from those flocks themselves. Most happy in being by those flocks, but not to substitute them for Christ Himself. Not to be satisfied with being by Christ's flocks, or being fed by His companions instead of Christ Himself. Safer to find no rest than to find it by turning aside.

3. *The fear of turning aside, or of bringing reproach on His name, a powerful plea in pleading with Christ for His presence.* Right to *plead* as well as pray.

4. *Believers liable to be mistaken for hypocrites and mere professors* Christ Himself thus mistaken. 'We esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted' (Is. liii. 4).

5. *Believers often unable to understand the reason of the Lord's dealings with them.* Rebekah's question not uncommon with believers: 'Why am I thus?' (Gen. xxv. 22). Three *Why's:* Why have I darkness and trouble while others have light and comfort? Why am I without quickening means of grace while others enjoy them? Why have I not the enjoyment of the Lord's presence which others have?

Answer to Shulamite's Request.

The request, though addressed to the absent Bridegroom, apparently answered by the Daughters of Jerusalem or Ladies of the Court who were present (VERSE 8).

If thou know not,
O thou fairest among women,
Go thy way forth
By the footsteps of the flock,
And feed thy kids
Beside the shepherds' tents.

Shulamite receives a speedy answer to her request, though perhaps not a very direct one; nor yet from the Beloved himself, to whom it was addressed, but from his friends and the inmates of his house. Observe—(1) The earnest enquirer after Christ not long in receiving direction: 'Ye shall seek Me and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart' (*Jer.* xxix. 13). (2) Various ways by which Christ may direct the enquiring soul. The Head of the Church at no loss for instruments. (3) Enquirers often directed by the ministers of the Word, or by those already acquainted more or less with the Saviour. (4) Those having any knowledge of Christ to do their best in guiding others to Him. (5) The great end of the Christian ministry and of the Christian Church, to direct men to Christ. All Christians to be able to give such direction. From the language of the answer in the text, observe—

I. *The* ADDRESS. 'O thou fairest among women.' A superior beauty belonging to believers. That beauty a moral and spiritual one, the beauty of holiness. 'The King's daughter all glorious within' (Ps. xlv. 11, 13; cx. 3). Observe—

1. *Believers to commend themselves to others by their spiritual beauty.* Something in a spiritually-minded, loving, and consistent believer that attracts the notice and admiration of others.

2. *Believers are, as they* OUGHT *to be, more excellent and lovely than their neighbours* (Prov. xii. 26). Possessed of a Divine nature. Born of God. Made new creatures in Christ. Created in Him unto good works The Spirit of Christ, and so the *fruits* of the Spirit, in them (Rom. viii. 9; Gal. v 22). Not to be satisfied to be like others (Matt. v. 46—48).

3. *Believers not merely to be, but to be seen to be, more lovely and excellent than other men* (Matt. v. 16; 1 Pet. ii. 12). Ought to appear in the eyes of men as the Bride of Christ. Their calling to reflect His beauty, and be His witnesses and representatives in the world. Men to see in believers what Christ was and is. Christ Himself infinitely

lovely, His Spouse, possessing His Spirit, expected to be lovely also. His comeliness put upon them (Ezek. xvi. 10, 14).

4. *Individuals never more lovely than when earnestly seeking Christ.*

5. *Others often stirred up by the earnestness of one soul seeking the Saviour.*

II. *The* SUPPOSITION. 'If thou know not.' Observe—

1. *Believers expected to know where Christ is to be found.* Ought to know. Not according to their character to be ignorant.

2. *Knowledge sometimes possessed when not exercised.* Apparently the case here.

3. *Young believers often deficient in spiritual knowledge* (John xiv. 8, 9).

4. *Patience to be exercised in dealing with inquirers and young believers.* Christ Himself a High Priest who has compassion on the ignorant. Believers to resemble Him.

III. THE DIRECTION. Twofold—

1. '*Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock.*' Three ideas in this part of the direction. (1) '*Go thy way.*' To find Christ, we must use means, and use them *earnestly*. The direction opposed to indolence and sitting still. (2) 'Go thy way *forth*.' To find Christ, we must not only go our way, but go *forth*. 'Let us go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach' (Heb. xiii. 13). Forth from—(i.) *Ourselves:* no longer trusting in anything we are or do; (ii.) The *world:* its pleasures and practices, its favour and fellowship. (iii.) *Sin:* so as no longer to love it or willingly to commit it. (3) '*By the footsteps of the flock.*' Observe in regard to the—

Footsteps of the Flock.

(i.) *Christ's flock has footsteps in common.* One spirit in them; one faith and one baptism. The 'common faith,' the 'faith of God's elect;' 'like precious faith with us' (Eph. iv. 4, 5; Tit. i. 4; 2 Pet. i. 1). (ii.) *The footsteps and daily life of believers to be such as conduct to Christ.* (iii.) *To find Christ, we need to be in the footsteps of the flock,* not in the wanderings of the world. These footsteps are—(*a*) *Obedience:* 'why call ye Me Lord, and do not the things which I say.' (*b*) *Faith:* 'whose faith follow;' 'the steps of the faith of our father Abraham' (Heb. xiii. 7; Rom. iv. 12). (*c*) *Self-denial;* 'If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself.' (*d*) *Meekness and humility:* 'Learn of me, for I am meek and holy in heart' (Matt. xi. 28). (*e*) *Love:* 'walk in love;' ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another (Eph. v. 2; John xiii. 35). The footsteps of the flock exhibited in the Word of God for our guidance. The cloud of witnesses. The faith and obedience of Abel, Abraham, &c., recorded as footprints to guide those who should come after. Hence, also, the value of faithful Christian biography. (iv) *Inquirers to be the careful followers of Christ's faithful people.* 'Be ye followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' 'Be followers together of me, and mark them that walk so as ye have us for an example.) 'Followers of me even as I also follow Christ' (Heb. vi. 11, 12; xiii. 7; Phil. iii. 17). Believers to 'enquire for the old paths, and walk therein' (Jer. vi. 16). To go back to the inspired words of prophets and apostles. 'To the law and to the testimony;' not to the decrees of Councils, or the dicta of Doctors, or the lives of so-called Saints. The Church early corrupted with heresy in doctrine, and error in practice. Even early Christian writers often heated with controversy. Not only contradicted one another, but often contradicted themselves. In many cases, impossible to obtain a clear and definite opinion from them. Their writings often mutilated and interpolated. Their views often manifestly and avowedly incorrect. The example even of the holiest of men to be only followed in so far as it accords with the written Word. (v.) *Inquirers to be content with old and ordinary directions as to finding Christ.* No new or extraordinary direction given to the Bride in her difficulty. (vi.) *Directions not the less useful because not immediately bringing us to the object of our search.* 'Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?' 'Go to Damascus, and it shall be told thee what thou must do' (Acts ix. 6).

2. '*Feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.*' Shulamite addressed as a shepherdess. Believers made partakers of the calling and work of their Master. Christ the chief Shepherd; they, in their various spheres, and according to their various gifts, under-shepherds. 'Feed my lambs; feed my sheep,'—the evidence of their love to the Great Shepherd (Rom. xxi. 15, 16). Shulamite, as a female, had her kids to feed. If unable to feed the sheep, we may be able to attend to the lambs. The gifts of some qualify them to minister to the adult and the mature Christian; those of others to the young and the weak. Two particulars in this part of the directions. (1) '*Feed thy kids.*' Observe—(i) *Believers and inquirers have their kids to feed:* (*a*) Their spiritual desires and longings to be satisfied; (*b*)

Their new man, or young spiritual renewed nature, to be nourished and strengthened; (*c*) The souls of others, in one way or other committed to their charge, to be cared for and looked after. A Christian parent has his children's souls as well as their bodies to feed and care for. A Sabbath-school teacher has his class; a minister has his flock, including both old and young. A District Visitor has the families of his or her district. Elders, deacons, and other Church office-bearers, have their respective charges. Each believer has the souls in his immediate neighbourhood, in the circle of his relations, within the sphere of his influence, or under his employment. The language only of a Cain,—'Am I my brother's keeper?' The injunction laid on believers in general,—'On some have compassion, making a difference; others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire' (Jude 22, 23). The resolution of David to be that of every saved soul: 'Then (when thou hast restored to me the joy of thy salvation) will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee' (Ps. li. 12, 13). Every believer, in his measure, charged with the care of his fellow-believers. Their duty to comfort, edify, and exhort one another (1 Thess. iv. 18; v. 11; Heb. iii. 13). (ii.) *Believers and inquirers to be diligent in feeding their kids.* Christ most likely to be found by us when diligently attending to the charge committed to us. To be found in active duty as well as in private devotion. (2) '*Beside the shepherds' tents.*'

The Shepherds' Tents,

representative of Christian assemblies gathered together in Christ's name, or rather of the places where they are so gathered. A body of people, and the place of their ordinary meeting, naturally associated in thought. Hence the term 'Church' originally applied only to the former, also used to designate the latter. Churches and congregations of believers placed by Christ, the chief Shepherd, under the charge and care of under-shepherds. These ordinarily in the New Testament designated Elders or Presbyters, Bishops or Overseers, and Pastors or Shepherds. These titles acknowledged to have been originally applied promiscuously to the same persons (Acts xiv. 23; xx. 17, 28; Eph. iv. 11; Phil. i. 1; 1 Tim. iii. 1—5; iv. 14; Titus i. 5—7; 1 Pet. v, 1—4). Shepherds or Pastors Christ's gifts to His Church after His ascension into heaven (Eph. iv. 10—12, Jer. iii. 15). The Shepherds' tents the places where the Shepherds are found ministering to the flock (1 Pet. v. 1, 2). Observe—(i) *Christ found beside the shepherds' tents'* (Matt. xviii. 19, 20). Himself always engaged in tending His sheep. Not far off when we are beside the 'Shepherds' tents.' Inquiring and believing souls directed to the place where Christ is feeding His flock through His under-shepherds. (ii.) *True Pastors and Gospel ordinances to be highly valued and diligently made use of* (Heb. xiii. 17; 1 Thess. v. 12). None allowed to be above ordinances in the Church militant. (iii.) *Believers to feed their charge and attend to their own souls, where Christ, His people, and His under-shepherds are.* 'They who separate themselves,' given as a mark of those who have not the Spirit (Jude 19). 'Forsaking the assembling of themselves together' not the manner of Christ's flock (Heb. x. 25). Isolation from Christ's ordinances not the way to find Christ. (iv.) *The kids also to be fed beside the shepherds' tents.* Safest and best to accustom children to attend the ordinances of Christ's house. 'Train up a child in the way he should go.' Christ's will concerning children: 'Suffer the children to come unto Me;' but Christ is where two or three are gathered together in His name. The shepherds in their ministrations to have a portion for the young as well as the old. The children an important portion of the flock, and to be carefully attended to. 'How is it that your sheep look better than other people's?' was asked of a farmer. 'I look well to the lambs,' was the reply. (v.) *The importance, necessity, and permanence of the pastoral office indicated.* Pastors and teachers, &c., given 'for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man—unto the measure of the statue of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. iv. 11—13). The charge difficult, and sometimes painful and hazardous; but honourable, often pleasant, and when faithfully executed, blessedly rewarded (1 Pet. v 1—4). People without a faithful pastor like sheep without a shepherd. As such, the object of Christ's special compassion, and should be that of His people (Matt. ix 36—38).

The Royal Bridegroom's Greeting.

SECOND SCENE. Place: *The open grounds adjacent to the Palace.* Speakers: *The King and Shulamite; the daughters of Jerusalem or ladies of the Court, at a distance.*

VERSES 9—11.

I have compared thee, O my love,
To a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.
Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels;
Thy neck with chains of gold.
We will make thee borders of gold
With studs of silver.

Shulamite, having gone forth according to the direction of the ladies of the court, the King meets her with his loving greeting. Observe:—(1) *The earnest seeker of Christ and His fellowship, certain sooner or later to find Him.* Historically exemplified in the case of the Wise Men of the East, who came to Jerusalem seeking the infant King; and of those devout and praying men and women who were found at the birth of Jesus waiting for the consolation of Israel. Possibly, according to the view of the Jews, a retrospective reference to the Lord's gracious appearance and promise to Moses and Israel when mourning after the sin of the Golden Calf (Exod. xxxiii. 10—14; xxxiv. 4—10). (2) *Christ's own time for the manifestation of Himself to the seeking soul the best.* That time, as apparently here, often sooner than expected. (3) *The joy in finding, such as abundantly to compensate for all the grief in seeking.* Such indicated by the character of the bridegroom's greeting. Observe in regard to it:—

I. *The* APPELLATION. 'O my love.' *Hebrew*, 'My companion.' Given here for the comfort and joy of the seeker. Observe: (1) Earnest pursuit after Christ rewarded by sweet assurance of His love to us and our interest in him. (2) Christ's spouse manifested by her earnestness in following after and resolution not to rest without Him. (3) Sweet assurance of Christ's love often follows deep sense of our own unworthiness. 'I am black'—soon followed by—'O my Love.' (4) When blackest in our own eyes, often fairest in Christ's. The Appellation exhibits believers as—

The Bride of Christ.

1. *The high distinction of believers that they are Christ's Bride.* Eve, in relation to Adam, a type of the great body of believers, and of each believer in particular, in relation to Christ the second Adam. This relation between the Saviour and the Saved, the Church and her Head, recognised and taught throughout the Word. Christ, or God in Christ, everywhere in the Bible the Bridegroom and Husband of believing souls. (See Introduction.) This relation the foundation of the Song. Typified in that of ancient Israel as God's covenant people.

2. *This relation acknowledged and rejoiced in by Christ Himself.* Believers acknowledged and delighted in by Christ as His Father's gift, as Eve by Adam when God brought her to him and gave her to him to be his wife (Gen. ii. 22; iii. 12; John xvii. 6). Repenting and believing sinners acknowledged by Jesus when on earth as his Bride (Luke v. 29—35). That relation the ground of His redemption work (Eph. v. 25—27).

3. *The great happiness of believers that they are Christ's Bride.* A blessedness beyond conception involved in so intimate, tender, and enduring a relation to the King of Kings and Lord of Glory, in whom is summed up all created and uncreated loveliness and excellence, and who is Love itself. The joy attending the realization of such a relationship justly described as 'unspeakable and full of glory' (1 Peter i. 8). No light thing in David's eye to be son-in-law to a poor earthly king like Saul. Archangels fail to tell the blessedness of being Bride to the King of Glory, the Prince of the kings of the earth.

4. *An enhancement of this blessedness to receive the testimony of the relationship from Christ Himself.* This testimony often spiritually and sweetly conveyed to earnestly seeking believers even on earth. A personal testimony from His own lips, given face to face, awaiting every child of God hereafter. The blessed hope of believers.

5. *Believers reminded of the duty and responsibility connected with such a relationship.* Cæsar's wife to be above suspicion. What, then, the Bride of Christ? The proper character of such a Bride to be without spot. Christ's honour in her keeping. His joy in her purity and undivided love. Natural for believers to tremble at the first rising of sin, as a dove at the sight of a hawk's feather. Sin in a believer a double crucifixion of Christ. The most painful wounds those which a man receives in the house of his friends. Believers, as Christ's

Bride, justly expected—(1) Carefully to avoid every sin; (2) Jealously to watch against every rival in their affection; (3) Constantly to beware of any coolness or distance between them and Christ; (4) Faithfully to seek to obey His commands, promote His interests, and advance His glory.

II. *The* COMPARISON. 'I have compared thee,' &c. Notice—

1. *The party making it.* The Bridegroom himself. Observe:—(1) *The main thing to have the good opinion of Christ.* Of comparatively small importance what men think of us. Christ best acquainted with us. Best knows what is real worth and true beauty. Can be surety for His own assertion. (2) *Christ observant of his people's graces and the exercise of them.* The comparison in the text the result of His close observation of the Bride's spirit and conduct. (3) *Nothing more pleasing in Christ's eyes than a soul earnestly and lovingly seeking Him and His fellowship as its chief joy.* This the case even when He gives no intimation of it, or appears to take no notice. His own time for giving such intimation the best. (4) *What excellence Christ ascribes to His people is what He Himself has given.* Not only makes the comparison, but provides it. His comparison not merely one of word, but of previous act. He makes His bride what He loves, then compares and commends her.

2. *The comparison itself.* 'To a company of horses (or, to my mare) in Pharaoh's chariots.' The best and most beautiful horses those from Egypt; and naturally the best of all those employed in drawing the royal chariot. Such horses obtained by Solomon from Egypt (1 Kings iv. 26; x. 26, 28, 29). The comparison in the text either to a single mare, to a team drawing together, or to the whole stud in the royal stables. The comparison of a beautiful woman to a Thessalian mare found in an ancient Greek poet. Horses celebrated in Oriental poetry for their beauty. Arabs passionately attached to their mares. The points of comparison: (1) *Beauty.* So—'his goodly horse' (Zech. x. 3). (2) *Liveliness and ardour.* See the description of the horse in Job xxxix. 19—25. (3) *Courage and endurance.* Hence especially employed in ancient warfare. 'His goodly horse in the battle' (Zech. x. 3). See again the description in Job. (4) *Obedience and subjection.* Horses naturally wild and wilful. Brought into subjection and broken in by man's effort and skill. 'Tamer of steeds,' a Homeric epithet for a hero. The horse, when broken in and trained, obedient to the slightest intimation of the rider or driver's will. (5) In the case of a team,—*harmony and united action.* Draw with one mind, will, step. (6) *Discipline and order.* Horses employed in drawing chariots, not only broken in, but well trained, so as to run in the traces with the greatest regularity and order. (7) As horses in Pharaoh's chariots,—*excellence in their kind, the best training, the most costly and beautiful ornaments, and employment in the King's service.* The

Proper Character of Believers,

especially when it is well with them. (1) Beautiful in holiness, and comely with the Divine comeliness put upon them (Ps. cx 3; Ezek. xvi. 14). (2) Lively and ardent, instead of being slothful and lukewarm. (3) Strong and courageous in fighting the good faith, and enduring to the end. (4) Obedient to their Divine Master, and subject in all things to His will (5) A unity in plurality; one and yet many; many in number, yet with one spirit; many individual believers, yet but one Bride and one Body. (6) United in action; striving together for the faith of the Gospel; engaging with one heart in the service of Christ and the advancement of His kingdom (1 Cor. i. 10; Eph. iv. 4; Phil. i. 27; ii. 2). (7) Subdued and well-disciplined under the Holy Ghost; no longer, as at first, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; made willing in the day of Christ's power; walking orderly, and subject to one another according to the rule of the Gospel (Ps. cx. 3; Col. ii. 5; 1 Cor. xiv. 40). (8) The most excellent of their species, not naturally or by their own merit, but by God's grace; the excellent of the earth; God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Ps. xvi. 3; Eph. ii. 10). (9) Arrayed in the garments of salvation, clothed with humility, and adorned with a meek and quiet spirit. (10) Employed by the King of Zion in His service as His fellow-workers; drawing in the chariot of the Gospel, and commissioned to carry it to the ends of the earth,—Christ Himself going forth in it, conquering and to conquer. Hence in regard to believers—(i.) Their *honour and blessedness;* (ii.) Their *duty and responsibility;* (iii.) Their *indebtedness to Divine grace.* Formerly Satan's willing slaves, and his depraved instruments in furthering his cruel and abominable purposes. Now the willing and happy subjects of Jesus, employed in his honourable holy, and blessed service in promoting the salvation and happiness of a world.

III. *The* COMMENDATION. 'Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels,' &c. Cheeks mentioned as now uncovered. Perhaps in allusion to the comparison already made in

verse 10. Ornaments of gold, silver, and jewellery about the face and neck, greatly esteemed in Oriental countries, So Arabs adorned both their horses and camels, as well as their own persons (Jud. viii. 26). Such ornaments thought to set off and add to female beauty. Observe—

1. *Believers highly beautiful and commendable in the eyes of Christ.* Often like Himself, without form or comeliness in the eyes of the world, but beautiful and comely in His.

2. *Wonderful change in a believer's character.* Cheeks comely with grace and love, instead of a whore's forehead and a brow of brass. Their neck no longer stiff with an iron sinew, and burdened with the yoke of Satan; but adorned with the golden chains of heavenly wisdom (Prov. i. 9; xxv. 12; Matt. xi. 29, 30; Gal. v. 1).

3. *The spiritual beauty of believers not natural to them, or properly their own, but imparted to them and put upon them by Divine grace.* The 'rows of jewels' and 'chains of gold' something put upon the Bride. Believers made comely with the 'comeliness put upon them' (Ezek. xvi. 14). Their ornament Christ Himself, whom they put on as well for wisdom and sanctification as for justification or righteousness (Rom. xiii. 14; 1 Cor. i. 30). 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' 'Not I, but the grace of God which was with me' (Gal. ii. 20; 1 Cor. xv. 10). All the graces of a believer the fruits of the Spirit who has been given to him (Gal. v. 22). 'Who maketh them to differ? and what hast thou that thou hast not received?' (1 Cor. iv. 7).

4. *The duty of believers to aim at being as they are here represented.* The graces of the Spirit given them in Christ, to be put on and worn by them as their own. Their duty to be putting on Christ from day to day, 'as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.' As the elect of God, holy and beloved, believers to put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, &c. (Col. iii. 12).

5. *Believers' spiritual beauty the Bridegroom's joy.* The language of the text that of admiration, satisfaction, and delight. 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him.' His joy fulfilled in His faithful, obedient, and loving people. The name He gives to His Church—Hephzibah, or, 'My delight is in Her.' His believing people a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty in His hand. 'Hearken, O daughter and consider, &c.; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty' (Psalm xlv. 10, 11)

6. *The graces of Christ's people to be open and conspicuous to the world.* The Bride's cheeks and neck here commended. Men to be able to see the believer's good works, that they may glorify God who makes him what he is. To take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus. The Church to be able to magnify the grace of God in us. The world to know and believe from what they see in believers that God has sent His Son. Believers to be living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men (2 Cor. iii. 2).

IV. *The* PROMISE. 'We will make thee borders (circlets or diadems), of gold,' &c. The speaker changed from the singular to the plural. Still, however, the king. Speaks in the plural either in the style of majesty, or as having others associated with him in the fulfilment of the promise. Christ, in His purpose of adorning His Church with the beauties of holiness and the insignia of royalty, has associated with Him the Holy Spirit given Him by the Father for that object. The Spirit the great agent both in the believer's sanctification and glorification. A similar style to that in the text used in connection with the creation of man (Gen. i. 26). The same Divine Trinity engaged both in the first and second creation—in creating man at first, and in renewing him when fallen (Isaiah vi. 8; Matt. xxviii. 19; 2 Cor. xiii. 14). Observe, in relation to the promise—

1. *The purpose of Christ to perfect believers both in holiness and glory.* The will of God their sanctification and perfection. The object for which Christ gave Himself for the Church, that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. v. 24—26). Believers chosen in Christ by the Father before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blame before Him in love. Blessed by Him for this object with all spiritual blessings, as the result of that election (Eph. i. 3, 4). Predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. viii. 29). Believers to be adorned in a way worthy of the Bride of the Son of God. Changed from glory unto glory. Their path like that of the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day (Prov. iv. 18; 2 Cor. iii. 18).

2. *Adequate agency employed for the accomplishment of such a purpose.* '*We* will make thee,' &c. The Triune Jehovah the Almighty Agent. Believers God's workmanship. The branch of His planting, and the work of His hands, that He may be glorified (Isa. lx. 21; Eph. ii. 10). Their sanctification and salvation the work of their Divine Creator. That Agent able to make them perfect in every good word and work. Able to do exceeding abundantly above all

we ask or think. To sanctify wholly, throughout body, and soul, and spirit. Nothing too hard for the Lord. Able to subdue all things to Himself. Believers saved and glorified according to the working of His mighty power put forth in raising the Lord Jesus from the dead. More not to be desired; less unable to suffice.

3. *The destiny of the Church and of each individual believer unspeakably glorious.* 'Borders (headbands or diadems) of gold, with studs (points or spanglets) of silver.' Believers to be made a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty in the hand of the Lord (Isa. lxii. 3). To be made as glorious as the Bride of the King of glory ought to be;—as glorious as a loving and Almighty Husband can make them. To be made entirely like Christ, and to share His glory. To sit with Him on His throne; and as kings and priests, to reign with Him for ever and ever. Their glorious destiny yet to be revealed. It doth not yet appear what we shall be (1 John iii. 2). Certain, however, in its accomplishment, as being—(1) The object of a Divine purpose; (2) The subject of a Divine promise; (3) The work of a Divine Agent.

4. *The Church's experience and character a progressive one.* True in relation both to the Church as a whole and to each individual member. The glory of the former Legal Dispensation eclipsed by the superior glory of the new Dispensation of the Gospel. The latter, the Dispensation of the Spirit; the former, that of the letter. The former characterized by a spirit of bondage and fear; the latter by a spirit of liberty and adoption,—of 'love, power, and a sound mind.' Under the Gospel all classes to receive largely of the Spirit, and as the result of it to prophesy (Acts ii. 17, 18; Joel ii. 28, 29). Some better thing reserved for the Church in the Dispensation of the Gospel. The light of the moon to be as the light of the sun. The millennial age that shall follow still more glorious. The light of the sun as the light of seven days (Isa. xxx. 26). Believer's glory an ever-advancing one. Fair as the moon; clear as the sun; terrible as an army with banners (Song vi. 10).

5. *The promise of growth in grace and of future glory given for the consolation of earnest believers.*

6. *Grace exercised and improved, followed and rewarded with grace increased* (Matt. xiii. 12; Luke xix. 26).

BRIDE'S REPLY TO THE KING'S GREETING.

Shulamite expresses her Delight in her Beloved.

VERSES 12—14.

While the King sitteth at his table,
My spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.
A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me;
He shall lie all night (or, which remains) betwixt my breasts.
My Beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphor
In the vineyards of Engedi.

The King's commendation and assurance of love reciprocated by the Bride. The language of the 12th verse—'*while the King sitteth*,' &c., either the declaration of a fact, expressive of her delight in the King, and the joy his presence afforded her; or a *resolution* as to what she would do for his honour. Regarded as the latter, it corresponds with the King's last words. Solomon promises ornaments of gold and silver. Shulamite can only bring her spikenard; which, however, shall not be wanting in order to do him honour and express her love. Historically and literally realized in the life of Jesus, when the woman that was a sinner brought her alabaster box of ointment to anoint His feet in the Pharisee's house; and when Mary, the sister of Lazarus, performed a similar service with her costly spikenard in the house of Simon the leper (Luke vii. 37, 38; John xii. 3; Matt. xxvi. 6, 7).

In regard to the RESOLUTION, notice—

I. *The* OCCASION *to which it refers.* 'While the King sitteth at his table' (or, 'in his circle [of guests]'). Observe, in reference to—

The King at His Table.

1. The *person* referred to. 'The King.' So Shulamite speaks of her Beloved, and the believer of his Lord. Christ a King. Imports his dignity as God and his office as Redeemer. Christ a King both by Divine right and Divine appointment A King in virtue of his Divine nature as Son of God; and in virtue of His mediatorial undertaking as Son of Man. In His twofold nature as God-man, and in His mediatorial character as Redeemer, Christ is God's King; King of Zion; King of Saints; Head over all things to His Church. Sits at the Father's right hand upon His Father's throne, 'angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him.' The King and Lord of glory. Rules and reigns over both the Church and the world as King of Kings and Lord of Lords,—'Prince of the Kings of the earth.' In a lower, literal, and subordinate, though

important sense, the 'King of the Jews,' heir to the throne of his father David. The language of the text emphatic. Christ not only a King, but '*the* King.' The Church's own and only King. 'The great and only Potentate.' In Christ, 'love brings the majesty of the Creator down to the misery of the creature.' Observe—*The Church recognizes and acknowledges Christ as King, and as the King.* Even in the closest and most endearing fellowship, His dignity and the reverence due to him as King not forgotten. True enjoyment of His fellowship accompanied with an impression on the heart as to His royal character and dignity. Such fellowship thus distinguished from what is spurious, imaginary, fanatical. Nearness to Christ fitted to exalt our views of Him and increase our reverence towards Him. The seraphim in His presence veil their faces and their feet with their wings. The Prophet, beholding His glory in the temple, exclaims: Woe is me; for I am undone, &c.; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts (Isa. vi. 1—5; John xii. 45). John, the beloved disciple, in like circumstances 'fell at His feet as dead' (Rev. i. 17). Nathanael's adoring testimony at the beginning of the Gospel history—'Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.' Thomas's, at its close,—'My Lord and My God.' The sentiment of the Church well expressed in Ambrose's celebrated hymn,—'Thou art the King of glory, O Christ' The title in the text indicative of—(1) *The condescension of Christ in admitting sinful men to his fellowship.* Subjects seldom admitted to the table of their sovereign. Mephibosheth amazed at David's condescension in giving 'a dead dog' like him a place at his table. Christ not only admits to His intimate fellowship His own creatures, but creatures who have debased and polluted themselves with sin, and have been in active and open rebellion against Him. (2) *The honour and blessedness of believers.* Each believer not only admitted into the King's presence, but admitted there as the King's Bride and Beloved. Compared with this, the highest earthly honour and position as worthless as the fallen leaf of autumn. This privilege the believer's guarantee of all he needs for time and eternity. (3) *The believer's duty and responsibility.* If Christ be our King, we are to confess, follow, obey, serve, honour, and trust in Him as such. The believer to aim at shewing himself at all times and in all places, both by word and deed, the faithful subject of Christ his King.

2. The King's *place.* 'Sitteth at his table.' Observe—(1) *Christ has a table.* Has a table *in heaven.* A celestial banquet prepared by Him for all the saved. Abraham seen afar off by the rich man in hell, sitting at that table with Lazarus reclining on His bosom. Hereafter follows the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, when His 'Bride hath made herself ready' (Rev. xix. 9). Has also a table *on earth.* This that referred to in the text. The earthly rather than the heavenly experience of believers described in the Song. So the New Testament speaks of the Lord's, *i.e.*, Christ's table, and 'the Lord's Supper' (1 Cor. x. 21; xi. 20). One of the many connecting links between the Song of Solomon and the New Testament. The King's 'Table' on earth the *ordinances of the Gospel,* and especially their central part—

The Lord's Supper.

This ordinance expressed in the Scripture as a *Table,* not an *altar.* The Lord's Supper a *Feast,* after and upon a sacrifice offered up more than eighteen centuries ago, not the sacrifice itself. The Table in the Lord's Supper the *King's Table.* The King (i.) *appointed* it; (ii.) *provides* it; (iii.) *presides* at it. The Table not man's but the Lord's; hence for all who love and belong to the Lord, and only such. Hence, also, His Table to be only what He Himself directs and prescribes. Man's grievous sin in converting His Table into what Christ could no longer recognize as such. The Table appointed by the King for the refreshment, comfort, and strengthening of His Church in the wilderness. The provisions the *King's own;* while the outward, visible, and symbolical materials are, according to His appointment, provided by the Church. The provisions nothing less than *Himself.* Christ as crucified for us, fed upon by faith in the Supper, as exhibited under the symbols of bread and wine. His flesh, or Himself as the incarnate and crucified Redeemer, the true meat; and His blood as shed for the remission of our sins, the true drink of the soul. Christ the bread of life, to be constantly, as well as in the Supper, fed upon by faith. He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me. Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you (John vi. 35—58; 1 Cor. x. 16; xi. 23—29). Christ spiritually fed on by believers, as the Lamb Slain, as the typical lamb was carnally eaten by Israel in the Feast of the Passover. The King's Table thus richly furnished. Man eats more than angels' food. The Table on earth preparatory to the Table in heaven the marriage supper of the Lamb. (2) *Christ sits at His Table.* The King's Table not only appointed and provided, but *presided* at by the King. When the dis-

ciples prepared the last Passover and first Lord's Supper, Jesus 'sat down with the twelve.' Jesus sits at His own Table (Matt. xviii. 20). Is there for *His own sake*, delighting in the fellowship of His loving and believing people. 'I will come in to him and sup with him.' More especially, however, *for their sake.* Affords them quiet fellowship and intimate communion with Himself. Hence, the preciousness of the Lord's Table to believers. He is there Himself, not as changed into, or necessarily connected with, the bread and wine; but as revealing Himself graciously and spiritually to the souls of His people. Is there, not only as the *provisions*, but as the *presiding Head;* not merely as their crucified Redeemer, but as their living and loving Bridegroom. The King's Table precious, but more precious the presence of the King Himself. Feeding on Him, as exhibited in the bread and wine, believers have *life;* realizing his living and loving presence, they have life *more abundantly* Believers at the Lord's Table not only *feed on* Christ, but *have fellowship with* Christ. *He* speaks peace and comfort to their heart. *They* speak their petitions and desires into His ear. The King sits at His Table—(i.) To see that the guests want nothing; (ii.) To give them a loving welcome; (iii.) To gladden them with His presence and smile; (iv.) To receive their petitions; (v.) To bless the provision to their souls.

3. The *time* the King is at His Table. 'While the King sitteth,' &c. The King not always sitting at His Table. Only now and then, and that for but a limited period. That period often short. Christ at His Table in the upper room at Jerusalem at most for two or three hours. Seasons of special communion in general neither very frequent nor long continued. When the risen Saviour manifested Himself as such to the two disciples at Emmaus, he immediately 'vanished out of their sight.' Such the conditions under which the Lord's Table is spread on earth. Too often the causes of abridged communion in ourselves. Hence (1) earnest prayer to be made, that while the Table is spread the King Himself may be present at it, and present all the time that it is so. (2) Special care to be taken that there be nothing in us or by us to cause the time of His presence to be abridged. (3) Diligent improvement to be made of His presence while it continues. The King's golden sceptre being held out, believers to be ready with their petitions (Esther v. 2, 3).

II. *The* RESOLUTION *itself.* 'My spikenard sendeth (or hath sent) forth the smell thereof.' Spikenard, a fragrant liquid produced from a lowly shrub of that name. Wont to be poured on the head of guests at table (Luke vii. 46; Mark xiv. 3). This, and other perfumes, often carried about by Oriental ladies on their person. Shulamite had her's in order to shew her devotion to her beloved—to do him honour, and to minister to his pleasure and refreshment. Her spikenard to give forth its fragrance only while the King reclined at his table or in the circle of his friends, when she should lovingly pour it on his head or even on his feet. Perhaps her language figuratively expressive of the effect the King's presence had on her affections, in calling them into lively and ardent exercise. *Her own love the sweetest spikenard to the King.* Observe in regard to

The Believer's Spikenard.

1. The believer *has* spikenard. A spiritual as well as a material spikenard. The soul or spirit capable of being pleased and regaled as well as the senses. Spiritual spikenard, that in an individual or in the Church at large, which is most pleasing and delighful to God, to Christ, and to holy souls. Such the fruits and graces of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, &c. (Gal. v. 22). Holy and spiritual affections exhibited in corresponding actions God's delight (Ps. xxxvii. 23). The Philippians' gifts to Paul, 'an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable and well-pleasing to God' (Phil. iv. 18). Believers' prayers as incense (Ps. cxli. 2). These graces and virtues present more or less in every regenerate soul. The spikenard for the Lord's table more especially—(1) *Faith* in Jesus, as the Lamb slain; (2) *Love* to Jesus, kindled by the display of His dying love to us; (3) *Joy* in Him as our God and Saviour, our husband and friend; (4) *Repentance* and godly sorrow for the sins that caused Him to suffer; (5) *Self-dedication*—'O Lord, I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant and the son of Thine handmaid; Thou hast loosed my bonds' (Ps. cxvi. 16). (6) *Holy resolution*, to live by His grace a life of obedience and devotedness to His service. These graces and their lively exercise agreeable to Christ as most fragrant perfume. Costly and precious as the work of the Spirit and the result of the Saviour's own suffering and death. Symbolized in the frankincense and myrrh presented by the wise men to the new-born King, as well as in the spikenard poured on His head and feet by the hands of those whom He had saved.

2. *The believer's desire that his spikenard give forth its fragrance.* Not sufficient that the spikenard is present. Of little use while still only kept close in the vessel. When

Mary broke the box, the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. The graces of the Spirit to be not only in our souls, but in lively exercise. Hence the need of the prayer: 'Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; and blow upon my garden (the garden of Christ in my soul), that the spices thereof may flow out' (chap. iv. 16).

(3) *His desire in order that Christ may receive both honour and delight.* The object of the women who poured their spikenard on His head and feet. The desire of the loving believer that all he is and has, feels and does, be for the honour and gratification of his Saviour. The very spikenard all the King's own, and ours only by his kind and kingly favour; therefore to be for the King's own enjoyment. We have given Him the vinegar and gall to drink for our sakes; meet, therefore, we should give Him the fragrant spikenard of His own grace. Not only the spikenard itself His; but the emission of its fragrance due to His own presence. His manifested gracious presence like the gentle breeze that passes over the beds of spices, and causes them to exhale their sweets. Raises a cloud of sweet incense from the believer's renewed heart. Sitting with Christ, we obtain something of Christ in our spirit and walk. The bride breathes no fragrance but what she imbibes from her beloved. The clay vessel scented by the perfume that fills it. Christ the sun that dissolves the spikenard and extracts its odour. His presence at the table, that which brought forth the fragrance of the women's ointment. The believer's graces at the King's table do not so much impart sweetness to the King, as His presence there imparts sweetness to those graces. Hence, in relation to the Lord's Table, the duty of believers—(1) To have lofty views of Christ as 'the King'; (2) To think much of the King's condescension and love, and of their high privilege in being permitted to occupy a place at His table; (3) To pray earnestly that He may be pleased to be graciously present and to manifest Himself there to their souls; (4) To see that there is nothing in themselves to hinder this; (5) To be concerned that there be the Spirit's graces to please and entertain Him; (6) To seek that those graces be in full and lively exercise.

Verses 11 and 12, the Bride's commendation of her beloved, and her declaration of her love. 'A bundle (or bag) of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me; he shall lie all night' (or, 'which remaineth') &c. Observe how the Bride speaks of the King, 'my well-beloved.' So believers of Christ Jesus, the beloved of every believing soul. 'Whom having not seen ye love.' Christ's gifts precious to the believers; but more precious Himself. Love the first and the last thing required by Christ of His people. The object of His greatest desire, and that for which He gave Himself. When well with the believer, no question with himself as to his love to Christ. 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.' Ardent love its own certificate.—Christ commended in the text under a two-fold comparison:—

I. *A 'Bundle of Myrrh.'* Myrrh a fragrant gum exuding from a tree growing in Eastern countries, employed for imparting fragrance to the person, and often for that purpose carried by Eastern females in the bosom (chap. iii. 6; Est. ii. 12; Ps. xlv. 8). One of the chief spices in the East, and used in the composition of the Holy Anointing Oil (Ex. xxx. 23, 34). Christ a

Bundle of Myrrh.

1. *In Himself.* Includes in Himself all sweetness and fragrance. In Him a combination of all charms and excellencies. The totality of all graces and virtues resident in His person. Himself the concentration of all loveliness and sweetness. In Him a fragrance that fills heaven with delight. His person, names, titles, attributes, words and works, such as ought to diffuse joy in every sinner's heart, and actually do so wherever they are known. Not half the sweetness that is in Jesus enjoyed even by those best acquainted with Him on earth. Yet in that which is enjoyed, a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

2. *To the Believer.* 'Unto me.' The language—(1) Of *knowledge and apprehension.* The believer's happiness to be made to apprehend the excellence and sweetness that is in Jesus. Christ revealed to him and in him by the Father. His eyes opened and anointed by the Spirit to 'see that Just One.' Made by faith to behold the King in His beauty. Enabled to testify from experience—'Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into Thy lips.' 'We beheld His glory.' Whatever He is to others, to them He is a bundle of myrrh. To them that believe, He is precious. (2) Of *choice* and *appropriation.* Christ chosen and appropriated by the believer as his 'bundle of myrrh'—*his* joy and treasure. Others choose the finite and fading creature for *their* 'bundle of myrrh,' which perishes in the using. Believers, with Mary, choose Christ. First chosen by Him, they next choose *Him.* Their choice and appropriation of Him vindicated in the words of the Bride—'He shall lie all night (or simply—'which remains) betwixt my breasts.' The reference rather to the bundle of myrrh than to the beloved

himself, though indicating the bride's feelings and purpose regarding him. Like the bag of myrrh that remained constantly in the bosom, he should have the most intimate place in the affections of her heart. The believer's earnest desire and resolution to have Christ ever near him and ever with him—to enjoy His uninterrupted communion, to satisfy the longings of his soul with His presence and love, and never to part with Him. His desire expressed in the hymn:

"Abide with me from morn till eve;
For without Thee I cannot live."

Christ appropriated not as a dress to be put on and off again, but as a perfume to be carried in the bosom day and night. The present world a night to believers (Rom. xiii. 12). His personal coming brings the day. Himself the Bright and Morning Star. His spiritual manifested presence gives songs in the night. His presence and smile our bundle of myrrh. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace (John xvi. 33). Christians to be Christ-bearers. Not merely to wear His name but Himself. Not to carry a crucifix, or picture of Him on our person, but His living presence in our heart. That presence the secret of the believer's fragrance. The bag of myrrh in the bosom perfumed the whole person. The Spirit and life sweet and savoury, only as far as we have Christ in us and with us.

II. *A 'cluster of camphor.'* Camphor, or more properly cypress, or henna, an Oriental plant whose fragrant flowers grow in clusters. The spikes or springs of it carried about by Eastern females for the fragrance. Engedi, with its vineyards, near the western shores of the Dead Sea, and famous for its aromatic herbs, the place where the best cypresses grew. Christ not only to believers as fragrant cypress, but a cluster of it; not merely a cluster of cypress, but of the best and most fragrant cypress to be found,—cypress in the vineyards of Engedi. In Christ a concentration of all graces and virtues, all sweetness and excellence. Abraham's faith, Moses' meekness, Job's patience, David's devotion, Solomon's wisdom, Paul's zeal, and John's love, all united in Jesus in fullest perfection and concentrated strength. Christ in the world and in the Church like a cluster of cypress in the vineyard of Engedi. Whatever of excellence or sweetness found *there*, infinitely short of what is in *Him*. Nature lovely; Christ infinitely lovelier. Some men and women, especially believing ones, charming and attractive both in their spirit and their person. Christ incomparably fairer and more attractive than the children of men. Divine ordinances sweet and refreshing; Christ infinitely more so; and ordinances only sweet as Christ Himself is in them.

Bride and Bridegroom's Mutual Commendations.

I. The King's Commendation of Shulamite.

(Verses 15—17.)

Behold, thou art fair, my love;
Behold, thou art fair;
Thou hast dove's eyes (ver. 15).

The language earnest and emphatic. 'Behold:' expressive of admiration. Repeated with the declaration—'thou art fair,'—as indicative of strong emotion and deep conviction, as well as of the desire to assure the bride of its truth, and the difficulty of doing so. The assurance all the more necessary from Shulamite's own sense of her blackness, and the depreciation of her by the ladies of the Court on that account. Observe—(1) Believers' eyes more readily fixed on their own corruption than on Christ's grace in them. (2) Love delights in expressing high esteem for and admiration of its object. (3) Believers never fairer in Christ's eyes than when blackest in their own, and meekly enduring the contempt of others. (4) Believers not only beautiful in the eyes of others (verse 8), but very specially in the eyes of Christ Himself. Christ looks not at the blemishes, but the beauties of His people. The beauties His, the blemishes their own. 'He seeth no iniquity in Jacob.' Christ the best judge of beauty. To be beautiful in His eyes is to be beautiful indeed, and blessed as well as beautiful. Beautiful in His eyes, it matters little what we are in the eyes of others. 'Let them curse, but bless thou.' Christ looks not only at what believers are *now*, but at what they *shall* be *hereafter*. Views past, present, and future at one glance. Christ takes delight in His people's beauty (Ps. xlv. 10, 11). Rejoices over them as the Bridegroom over the Bride (Isa. lxii. 5). The double assertion: 'Thou art fair,' probably intended to express the *greatness* as well as the *reality* of Shulamite's beauty. A *two-fold* beauty in believers: beauty of the inward spirit and of the outward life; beauty in doing and in suffering; beauty in imputed righteousness and imparted grace. The repeated assertion of Shulamite's beauty, accompanied with the King's assurance of His love to her, and her relation to Him: 'My love.' Sweet and comforting, as well as strengthening and sanctifying to believers, to be assured of Christ's love, and of their relation to Him as His bride.

A special feature in Shulamite's beauty noted: 'Thou hast doves' eyes,' or 'Thine eyes are doves.' The eyes of Syrian doves distinguished for their softness, tenderness, and lustrous beauty. The eye especially the seat of beauty. The eyes of Syrian females particularly beautiful. The eye the expression of the soul. More especially the expression of inward affection. Hence the power of the eye in captivating the heart (chap. iv. 9; vi 5). Observe—(1) Christ notices not only the beauty of believers in general, but their single graces in particular; more especially He notices their love which has Himself for its object. (2) The eyes of believers those of doves, or doves themselves. The dove distinguished for (i.) gentleness and meekness; (ii.) affection and fidelity to its mate; (iii.) purity and cleanliness; (iv.) timidity and retiring disposition. Its character indicated in its *eyes*. The eyes of believers not those of the tiger, or the fox, or the hawk; but of the *dove*. The *contrast* of the believer's eyes indicated in Matt. xx. 15; 2 Pet. ii. 14; Ps. cxxxi. 1. Believers learn of Jesus to be meek and lowly in heart. The 'gentleness of Christ' to be a distinguishing feature in their character. 'Gentleness' is love holding intercourse with those around us. Implies tenderness of feeling; readiness of sympathy; considerateness of others. 'Gentleness' is 'love in its depth and in its delicacy.' Believers chosen in Christ to be holy and without blame before God in love (Eph. i. 4). Not to be drawn away from Christ by any suffering or persecution. Pass the time of their sojourning here in fear. Work out their salvation with fear and trembling (1 Pet. i. 17; Phil. ii. 12).

2. SHULAMITE TO THE KING.

(Verse 16).

Behold thou art fair, my beloved;
Yea, pleasant.

The Bride returns her Beloved's commendation. Every good word from Christ to be turned to His own praise. What the believer is made, he is made 'to the praise of the glory of His grace.' The title also reciprocated: 'My Beloved.' The believer made conscious both of His love to Christ and his relation to Him. Bride's commendation also commences with a note of exclamation: 'Behold.' Implies the reality and greatness of the King's beauty. His beauty a thing to be contemplated and dwelt upon. The ascription of beauty to the Bride returned as belonging rather to Himself. The believer's beauty only a reflection of Christ's. Shulamite commends her beloved as—

I. FAIR. Observe—

1. *Jesus supremely beautiful in the eyes of believers.* Their eyes anointed with Divine eye-salve to see His beauty. Able to testify with John we beheld His glory. Their blessedness, to behold even now, by the eye of faith, 'the King in His beauty.' Christ formerly to them as to others, a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness: now the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.

2. *Jesus in Himself transcendently beautiful.* Observe, in reference to the

Beauty of Christ—

1. Its *greatness*. His beauty such as no angel's hand could pourtray, or tongue describe. The exclamation of the prophet: 'How great is His beauty!' (Zech. ix. 17.) Of the Psalmist: 'Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips' (Ps. xlv.). (2) His beauty a glory such as becomes the Son of God: 'We beheld His glory; the glory as of the only begotten of the Father' (John i 14). All beauty summed up and centered in Jesus. Whatever is beautiful in the creature, found in Him in an infinitely greater degree. All creature-beauty only a ray or emanation from His own. Christ the fountain and ocean of beauty; all beauty in the creature, whether angel, man, or nature, only a stream from that fountain, or a drop from that ocean. His an essential beauty; theirs a derived one. All beautiful things in nature only made to reflect something of His beauty, and to lead up to it.

2. Its *character*. His beauty mainly a moral and spiritual one: 'Full of grace and truth.' His countenance, doubtless, indicative of that spiritual beauty. Not the less beautiful because, for our sakes, marred more than any man's, and soiled with blood and tears His beauty in His soul, but manifesting itself in His words, looks, and actions. Seen both in what He is in Himself, and in what He is to others, especially to poor sinners of mankind. His soul free from all sin, and full of all grace. All its powers and faculties in complete order and perfect harmony. His beauty seen not only in the separate graces of His character, but in their combination, proportion, and symmetry. Displayed in His love and loving-ness—His self-forgetting, and self-denying benevolence, sympathy, and compassion; in His gentleness and tenderness, His meekness and humility; in His kindness and condescension to the poor, the ignorant, and the despised; in His wisdom and intelligence, combined with forbearance and child-like

simplicity; in His patience in suffering and submission to His Father's will; in his fearlessness in regard to Himself with the tenderest care and consideration for others; in His manliness combined with meekness; in His firmness of principle with flexibility of manners; in His purity combined with pity; in His hatred of sin with love to the sinner; in His ardent affection for His friends with the most generous forgiveness of his enemies; in His supreme love to God combined with untiring self-sacrificing love to man.

II. PLEASANT. Shulamite adds—'Yea, pleasant' or comely. 'Yea,' indicating the difficulty she finds in expressing her appreciation of the King's excellence, and the delight she found in Him. Not only 'fair,' but 'pleasant' besides. The most beautiful not always the most pleasant. Christ not only beautiful but pleasant. Observe in regard to the

Pleasantness of Christ:

In Him the greatest moral *excellence* combined with the greatest *pleasantness*. Pleasantness a special quality, and superadded to excellence. Indicates what a person is in relation to others. That which renders a man amiable, agreeable, and enjoyable to those around him. The quality in an individual that affords pleasure and delight in his presence and society. Has special reference to one's spirit and temper, manners and deportment,—a person's *looks*, and the *tone of his voice*, as well as his words and actions. Implies a combination of *graces* as well as virtues; of *charms*, as well as excellencies; of *agreeable* as well as solid qualities, fitting their possessor for imparting *pleasure* as well as profit to those in contact with him. *Such pleasantness in Jesus.* Jesus fair in Himself; pleasant to others. Such that not only angels but men—not only the godly but sinners—may find pleasure in Him. The evidence of His pleasantness seen in His disciples who so fondly adhered to Him and so closely followed Him; in John the fisherman, who was wont to pillow his head on His bosom; in the multitudes that everywhere thronged about Him; in the publicans and sinners that drew near to hear Him; in the children that followed Him with their parents, and sang His praise in the temple-courts; in the infants that He took up in His arms, putting His hands on their head and blessing them. David's testimony in regard to Jonathan that of every believer in regard to Jesus: 'Very pleasant hast thou been unto me.' Jesus 'very pleasant' to believers now while conversed with through a veil. What when they see Him face to face?

3. SHULAMITE REJOICES IN THE KING'S FELLOWSHIP AND THE PLACE OF ITS ENJOYMENT.

Verses 16, 17.

Also our bed is green;
The beams of our house are cedar,
And our rafters of fir.

The scene now the grounds of the palace. Shulamite has found the King at the shepherd's tents. Intensely happy in each other's society and love, they sit down and repose on a green and flowery bank — the resting-place at noon (verse 7). The cedars spread their shady branches over them like the beams of a palace, while the fragant fir trees form a gallery for their walk. Shulamite notices these things, and in her delighted enjoyment of the King's fellowship, and her fine appreciation of the objects of nature, expresses her gratification in these agreeable surroundings. Brought up in the country, she is everywhere exhibited in the Song as an enthusiastic admirer of natural beauty. In this way as well as others, a meet companion for him who 'spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall' (1 Kings iv. 33). Enjoyment of a dear one's fellowship gives of itself a charm to the place which is the scene of it. The place where a believer has enjoyed sweet and hallowed communion with his Saviour, especially in the season of his first love, rendered beautiful in his eyes, and endeared to his heart. All the more so when this has been in the midst of natural scenery. With the joy of a soul's deliverance from bondage and possession of a newly found Saviour, all surrounding nature seems to be in harmony. By a law of our mental constitution, the joy transfuses itself over all surrounding objects. The mountains and hills break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field clap their hands (Is. lv. 12). Christ's graciously manifested person sheds a beauty and sweetness over every thing around us. Himself fair and pleasant, the very place becomes such where He is found and enjoyed. Where He treads, lilies and roses bloom. Hence the sweetness of Divine ordinances. Christ's fellowship usually most enjoyed in connection with the ordinances of His own institution. Gospel ordinances the shepherds' tents where the Chief Shepherd is found, and where He makes His flock to rest at noon. The promise,—'I will com

mune with them from off the mercy seat.' Hence, the very place of these ordinances, beautiful and delightful to a loving believer. 'How amiable are Thy tabernacles;' 'Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.' 'A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand.' Hence his longing desire after them. 'My soul longeth, yea even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord.;' 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and inquire in His temple' (Ps. lxxxiv.; xcvi.; lxiii.; xxvii.). This sweetness and charm connected with the sanctuary something very different from mere outward attraction; though it may be desirable that even that should not be altogether wanting. Nothing lost when that which meets the bodily eye is somewhat in harmony with the spiritual beauty of the sanctuary, which only the eye of the living soul can perceive and the renewed heart delight in.

Shulamite commends both the beauty of the grassy couch on which they reposed, and the agreeableness of the shade afforded by the trees which spread their branches over their heads like the beams of sylvan chambers. 'Our bed (or couch) is green (or flourishing); the beams of our house (Heb. "houses") are of cedar (or cedars are the beams of our chambers); and our rafters (or galleries) are of fir' (or fir trees are our rafters or galleries). Suggesting, in regard to

Divine Ordinances,

1. *Community of interest and participation on the part of Christ and His people.* '*Our* bed;' '*our* house;' as pertaining both to the bride and bridegroom. So Divine ordinances the joint property of Christ and His people. The temple at Jerusalem spoken of as both God's house and that of the people: 'Our beautiful house;' 'Your house is left unto you desolate.' The sacrifices participated in both by God and the offerer. Called 'the bread of their God,' 'the food of the offering made by fire unto the Lord' (Lev. iii. 11; xxi. 6, 8, &c.). Christian ordinances intended both for the enjoyment of Christ and His people. 'If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him, and will sup with him and he with me' (Rev. iii. 21).

2. *Repose as well as comfort to the soul.* Christ found in the ordinances of his house as 'the rest and the refreshing' wherewith 'the weary' are to be made to rest, and 'as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land' (Is. xxviii. 12; xxxii. 2). 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me.' 'There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most high' (Ps. xlvi. 4; xxvii. 4, 5).

3. *Freshness and life.* 'Our bed is green' or flourishing. The ordinances of the Christian Church, wherever two or three are gathered together in the Master's name, as fresh and lively, as full of blessing and as precious to believers *now* as when after Pentecost the disciples 'continued steadfast in the Apostles' fellowship and doctrine, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers' (Acts ii. 42). These ordinances as sweet and refreshing to the believer at the close of his earthly pilgrimage as at the beginning of it. The promised presence of Christ and the operation of His Spirit, that which keeps the couch green and flourishing. 'There is a river, &c.'

4. *Strength and permanence.* 'The beams of our house are *cedars*.' Strength as well as beauty in God's sanctuary (Ps. xcvi. 6). Christ's promised presence gives permanance, as well as life and freshness, to ordinances. The Lord's Supper, the central ordinance of Christian worship, to continue till He come again. These ordinances have continued throughout eighteen centuries in almost all parts of the known world, and are, to a great extent, the same even in form at this day as when originally instituted and observed by the earliest converts. One precious fruit of the Reformation, the restoration of these ordinances to their primitive simplicity, after having been overlaid and disfigured both in the Eastern and Western Churches with rites and ceremonies of mere human invention. What is Divine in ordinances permanent as the cedars; what is merely human, perishable, and to be put away.

5. *Fragrance and beauty.* 'Our rafters (or galleries) of fir' (or, are firs or cypresses). The fir or cypress distinguished for its beauty as well as its fragrance. 'Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree.' Promised in connection with the sanctuary in Gospel times. 'The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree and the pine tree and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary' (Is. lx. 13; lv. 13). Beauty, as well as strength, in God's sanctuary (Ps. xcvi. 6). The fragrance and beauty of Divine ordinances not in the fumes of incense, or in external decoration, whether of place or persons; but in the truths of the Gospel exhibited, the presence of Christ enjoyed, and the power of the Spirit experienced in them.

Further Intercourse between the Betrothed.

Chapter II. Verses 1—3.

Shulamite's Self-Depreciation.

(Verse 1).

I am the rose of Sharon,
And the lily of the valleys.

The King and Shulamite still seated on their grassy couch. She, happy in his fellowship and love, and remembering her humble origin, appears to feel herself all unworthy of such a position, and with her eye on the wild flowers around her, to sigh out: 'I am but a wild flower of the plain, a humble lily in the valleys.' This view of the words probably more correct than that to which we have long with pleasure been accustomed, and which is rather the one suggested by our English version, viz., that which ascribes these words to the King instead of the Bride. Scarcely likely that here, and here alone, the speaker commends himself. Self-commendation, however just and becoming in the true Bridegroom, not the language of love, nor in consonance with the context and the rest of the poem. The rose probably not the flower here intended; but one of the bulbous kind; perhaps the meadow-saffron, crocus, or narcissus. The flower both common and abundant, and with little or nothing striking in it. Natural, in the circumstances of the case, for Shulamite thus to depreciate herself in the presence of the King, of whose love she sees herself so unworthy. Commentators and versions divided on the passage; the older ones applying these words rather to the King, the moderns more generally to the Bride. The spiritual instruction precious in either case.

1. *The believer's feelings, in the enjoyment of the Saviour's manifested presence and love, naturally those of deep humiliation and self-depreciation.* Such the feelings of Mephibosheth at the King's table, and of Peter on the revealed divinity of his Master in the fishing-boat. On the perception of Christ's glory, and the sense of His love to ourselves, our thoughts naturally thrown on our own unworthiness. 'I am not worthy of the least of (*Heb.*, I am less than) all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands' (Gen. xxxii. 10). So David: 'What am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto?' (2 Sam. vii. 18) and Elizabeth: 'Whence is this unto me, that the mother of my Lord should come unto me?' (Luke i. 42) Lowly views of one's self, and lofty views of Christ, the legitimate fruit of Divine communion. The lasting wonder of heaven and earth, that the King of Kings, possessed of infinite dignity and matchless excellence, should ally Himself in bridal union with a poor vile sinner.

"How should it be, Thou heavenly King,
That Thou shouldst us to glory bring?
Make slaves the partners of Thy throne,
Deck'd with a never fading crown.

"Hence our hearts melt; our eyes o'erflow;
Our words are lost; nor will we know,
Nor will we think of aught beside—
My Lord, my love, is crucified."

2. *The description in the text true of the believer.*—(1) Nothing more in him than in the millions of his race. A fallen child of Adam, shapen in iniquity, and a child of wrath even as others (Eph. ii. 2, 3). (2) Exposed to danger and destruction; like the flower of the field, ready to be trodden on, and crushed by every foot. Often accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Like his Master in the eyes of the world—'a root out of a dry ground; despised and rejected of men.' (3) Often chosen from among the poor and illiterate. 'Ye see your calling, brethren; how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.' 'Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?' 'He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people' (Ps. cxiii. 7, 8; 1 Cor. i. 26; James ii. 5).

The King's Commendation of Shulamite.

(Verse 2).

As the lily among thorns,
So is my love among the daughters.

To Shulamite's self-depreciating remark—'I am but a lily in the valleys,'—the King immediately replies: 'But as a lily among thorns, so is my love among and in comparison with all other women.' The more a believer sees and acknowledges his own unworthiness, the more lovely he appears in the eyes of the Saviour, and the more does the Saviour assure him of His esteem and love. The language of the text true as addressed by Christ to His people. His eyes, which are 'as a flame of fire,' view both believers and unbelievers in their real character. His testimony that of 'the Faith-

ful and True Witness.' His Church collectively and His people individually, while in this world and in comparison with others, a

Lily among Thorns.

In this Divine assertion, notice—

I. *The* LILY. Uncertain what species of lily is meant. According to some, the Scarlet Martagon, which grows in profusion in the Levant. Possibly the White Amaryllis intended. A species mentioned by Salt, in his Voyage to Abyssinia, whose white petals are marked with a single streak of bright purple down the middle. Believers compared to lilies, from—

1. Their *beauty*. Jesus speaks of the lilies of the field as adorned with a beauty to which that of Solomon, in all his glory, could not be compared. The Scarlet Martagon an exceedingly gorgeous flower. The wild flowers of Palestine in general very beautiful. Believers possessed of a moral and spiritual beauty—the beauty of holiness. Made partakers of the Divine nature, which is love. Renewed after the image of God and conformed to the likeness of Christ, who is 'fairer than the children of men,' and the embodiment of all beauty. Believers, as members of Christ, adorned with the graces of His Spirit—'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, &c.' Enabled by grace to cultivate, and increasingly to exhibit, 'whatsoever things are pure, just, lovely, and of good report' (Phil. iv. 8; Gal. v. 22).

2. Their *purity*. The White Amaryllis, or our common white lily, an emblem of purity. Believers made, by Divine grace, pure both in heart and life. Enabled by the hope of seeing Christ as He is, to purify themselves even as He is pure. Have purified their hearts through obeying the truth. Are sanctified through the truth. Sanctified in Christ Jesus. Made clean through the Word He has spoken to them. As 'pure in heart,' are admitted at death to the beatific vision of God.

3. Their *humility*. The White Amaryllis rises only two or three inches from the ground. The common white lily, with its drooping head, an emblem of humility and modesty. Believers called to be 'clothed with humility,' and to learn of Him who was 'meek and lowly in heart.' Made by Divine grace to be 'meek' and 'poor in spirit.' Represented by the Publican in the temple. Enabled to grow in humility as in other graces. Exemplified in Paul. His first acknowledgment: 'not worthy' to be called an apostle;' later on: 'less than the least of all saints;' last of all: 'the chief of sinners.' The heavier the ear of corn, the more it bends. A proud Christian a paradox. Faith essentially humble, as being simply emptiness receiving out of another's fulness, and weakness leaning on a Saviour's strength.

4. Their *fragrance*. According to Salt, the flower of the White Amaryllis is sweet scented, its smell 'resembling that of the Lily of the Valley, but much more powerful. Believers, according as they walk with Christ and possess His spirit, enabled to exercise a beneficial influence on others, and to diffuse a moral fragrance which makes their very presence a blessing. God's promise even to penitent backsliders: 'I will be as the dew unto Israel;' and as the consequence of it—'he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon: his branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon' (Hos. xiv. 5, 6). The believer's privilege so to carry Christ with him as to be a perfume and a benefaction wherever he goes.

II. *The* THORNS. The ungodly so called (2 Sam. xxiii. 6). Compared to a thorn hedge (Mic. vii. 4). *Thorns* as being—

1. *Unsightly*. Little beauty in a thorn. As little in the unregenerate in the sight of God and angels. Men in their fallen state and still unrenewed by Divine grace, 'corrupt, filthy, and abominable;' 'hateful and hating one another;' under the power of a carnal mind, which is 'enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' No truly good thing in them, or in the fallen nature which governs them. No longer bearing the moral image of God, but of His great adversary. 'Alienated from the life of God' who is love, and 'dead in trespasses and in sins.' Every imagination of the thoughts of their heart only evil continually (Gen. vi. 5; viii. 21; Ps. xiv. 1—3; Rom. iii. 10, &c.; viii. 7, 8; Tit. iii. 3; Eph. iv. 18; ii. 1):

2. *Hurtful*. Thorns pierce the hand that takes hold of them, and tear those that come in contact with them. So the ungodly (2 Sam. xxiii. 6). The unregenerate hurtful to their neighbours. Their influence, both conscious and unconscious, for evil rather than good. Their example injurious, as turning others away *from* God rather than turning them *to* Him. The Divine testimony: 'One sinner destroyeth much good.' Paul, in his unconverted state, 'a persecutor, and injurious.' The poison of asps under the lips of the ungodly. Their feet swift to shed blood. The impenitent and unbelieving often grieving thorns in the sides of believers, and even of their nearest relatives and best friends. Their words often such as

to leave a stain on the mind and a wound in the heart of others.

3. *Unprofitable.* Thorns and thistles part of the curse of barrenness inflicted on the earth for man's sin. 'Do men gather grapes of thorns?' Thorns only useful in making a hedge for the protection of what may do good to others. The Divine testimony regarding men in their natural state: 'They are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good; no, not one' (Rom. iii. 12). The unregenerate unable to benefit men as immortal souls. Aim neither at bringing glory to God nor salvation to men. Are only employed by God for subordinate purposes, and as His unintentional instruments for the protection of His people and the interests of His kingdom. The final sentence pronounced on the ungodly: 'Take ye the *unprofitable* servant,' &c.

4. *Destined to destruction.* Thorns, especially in the East, cut up to be burned, or set on fire as they grow (2 Sam. xxiii. 6; Is. ix. 18; x. 17; xxvii. 4; Heb. vi. 8). The end of the ungodly (Matt. xxv. 41).

III. *The* SITUATION OF THE LILY. 'Among thorns.' Beautiful wild flowers in Palestine often seen growing in the midst of a thorn bush or a thorn hedge. Believers, while in this world, necessarily among unbelievers. *In* an ungodly world, though not *of* it. Saints in Cæsar's household. The tares still suffered to grow among the wheat. The chaff and the wheat together till death separate them. Heaven or the new earth the only place where the thorns are not. The situation of believers among the ungodly over-ruled for their own improvement, for the benefit of others, and for the glory of Him whose grace makes them to differ, and whose power preserves them safe to His heavenly kingdom. The calling of believers, while in this world, to magnify the grace of God *towards* them, and to shew the excellency of His grace *in* them. Their aim to be among the unregenerate as the pure, modest, and harmless lily among thorns. Their loveliness, like that of the lily, to be all the more manifest and striking from their situation. Believers not to be surprised if called to suffer tribulation and persecution from the world. 'A lily among thorns' likely enough to be torn by them. Their comfort that it is only *here*, and for a short time, that their situation is that of a 'lily among thorns.'

IV. *The* SUPERIORITY OF THE LILY TO THE THORN. The language expressive of comparison as well as situation. The lily superior to the thorns among which it grows. So believers in relation to the world (1 John v. 19). 'The righteous more excellent than his neighbour.' Believers superior to others—

1. In *Character.* Believers renewed in the spirit of their mind after the image of God. Have Christ dwelling in them as their inward life, so that they become like Him who was 'holy, harmless, and undefiled.' Created anew in Christ unto good works; and engrafted into Him, so as to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, &c.

2. In *Usefulness to others.* Believers, from the new Divine nature implanted in them, able to benefit others for eternity as well as for time. Enabled by the Spirit of Christ in them to act upon the words of Christ: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' 'Freely ye have received, freely give.' Are qualified for being made, like Christ, a blessing to the world, by their example, their prayers, and their personal efforts. The salt of the earth, and the lights of the world. Unbelievers rather a hindrance than a furtherance to the real interests of others.

3. In their *Final Destiny.* Believers at death are transplanted in their spirits, and at the Lord's appearing also in their bodies, to a happier clime, to bloom as immortal lilies in the Paradise of God. Destruction and eternal death the end of the impenitent and unbelieving (Rom. vi. 21, 23; Phil. iii. 19). As thorns, destined to everlasting burnings (Is. xxxiii. 12, 14; Rev. xxi. 8).

Application. The world divided into two parts, lilies and thorns—regenerate and unregenerate, believers and unbelievers. To which do I belong? Am I lily or a thorn? All are thorns by nature. Lilies only made such by regenerating grace. Have I undergone this change? Out of a thorn has almighty grace made me a lily? If not, am I willing that it should be so now? Thorns spared for this purpose. The grace that has transformed others able to transform you also. That grace offered. Jesus, working in the Gospel by His Spirit, still transforms lilies into thorns, and is ready even now to transform *you*. He says: 'Look unto me, and be ye saved;' 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;' 'He that believeth on me though he were dead, yet shall he live.' 'Wilt *thou* be made whole?'

SHULAMITE'S COMMENDATION OF HER BELOVED.

VERSE 3.

As the apple-tree
Among the trees of the wood;
So is my beloved
Among the sons.

I sat down under His shadow
With great delight,
And His fruit
Was sweet to my taste.

Shulamite compares her beloved to an apple or citron tree growing among, or compared with, the common trees of the wood. The comparison natural. The lovers surrounded with trees as well as flowers. Observe—The more Christ shews His love to His people, the more they are drawn to commend Him as their Beloved. If Christ can commend the imperfect, and in Himself worthless, believer; how much more should the believer commend Him who is perfection and loveliness itself! Christ compared to

The Apple-Tree.

The word applicable to any tree of the class to which the apple-tree belongs. The Hebrew term expressive of the fragrance of the fruit. Probably the citron intended. The orange still common in Palestine, especially on the sea-coast. Perhaps more so than formerly. The citron-tree distinguished for its fruit, its foliage, and its shade. Hence its superiority to the common trees of the wood. Other trees might perhaps equal it in shade, but without the fruit or its beautiful appearance. All excellence and beauty comprehended in Christ. Compared with Him, mankind in general, and even believers themselves, only as the common trees of the wood, compared with the beautiful and shady citron or orange-tree with its golden, fragrant, and delicious fruit. The world itself little worth to him who knows Christ. 'What things were gain to me these I counted loss for Christ; yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord' (Phil. iii. 7, 8). Observe—

I. *The* COMPARISON *made.* 'As the apple-tree,' &c. The comparison of the Beloved to the apple or citron-tree made—

1. From its *appearance.* The citron-tree, larger, nobler, and more beautiful in appearance than the trees of the wood; for example, the dwarf oak, so common in Palestine. The citron or orange-tree, with its dark green glossy foliage, its white blossoms, and its golden fruit, a picture of beauty. So Christ; 'the chief among ten thousand,' 'fairer than the children of men.' Has in all things the pre-eminence over both angels and men. The first-born among many brethren. They priests; He the High Priest. They kings; He the King of kings. They pearls; He the One pearl of great price. The highest, greatest, and best among men but as the low stunted shrub, or common wild-tree in presence of the noble and beautiful citron.

2. From its *shade.* The foliage of the citron or orange-tree not only beautiful, but thick, and affording an agreeable shade. So Christ affords shelter and shade — (1) *To awakened sinners,* from the scorching sentence of God's righteous and broken law. The sinner, while out of Christ, pursued by the fiery law with its terrible curse: 'The soul that sinneth it shall die;' 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.' In Christ alone, as enduring the curse for him, can he find shelter. But there he can and does. 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us.' 'In Him we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins' (Eph i. 7; Gal. iii. 10). 'There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus (Rom. viii. 1). (2) To *tried and tempted believers.* Tribulation the appointed lot of believers in this world. Persecution unavoidable to those '*who will live godly in Christ Jesus.*' For a season, at times in heaviness through manifold temptations. Sometimes tried with fiery trials. Christ then their shade and shelter. 'In me ye shall have peace.' 'When thou walkest in the fire, I will be with thee. Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.' His presence with them as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. His grace promised to be sufficient for their both doing and suffering all His will. Hence enabled to rejoice even in tribulation and made more than conquerors through Him that loved them. Christ *crucified,* the shadow between sinners and the heat of God's wrath; Christ *crowned,* the shadow between believers and the wrath of men and devils. The shadow of Christ, the true apple-tree, gives life as well as peace and comfort to those who sit under it. Every other shadow only that of the deadly *upas.* A religion of the flesh to be avoided, which is only a sitting under the shadow of the 'letter which killeth.' Divine wisdom, to sit only under the shadow of Him who is the Truth and the Life.

3. From its *Fruit.* The fruit of the apple, citron, or orange tree, fragrant, delicious, and refreshing. Such the fruit of Christ. That fruit—(1) The *redemption* accomplished on the cross, with all the varied blessings of the everlasting covenant for time and eternity, flowing out of it. (2) The *doctrines of grace* in which that redemption is unfolded, and which are revealed in the Scriptures. (3) The *promises of the Word,* 'exceeding great and precious,' adapted to every case and condition, and all 'Yea and Amen to them that believe.' (4) The *ordinances of the*

Gospel; as prayer, the preaching of the Word, and pre-eminently the Lord's Supper. The fruit Christ's, as—(1) Procured *through* Him in His obedience unto death. (2) Found *in* Him. (3) Communicated *by* Him. On this apple-tree hangs fruit for immortal souls and dying sinners, and that in richest abundance. Fruit sweeter than that of Eden, with neither sin nor danger in the eating of it. Instead of a prohibition and threatened death, here is a free invitation and promised life. Instead of a flaming sword turning every way to guard its access, a silver trumpet sounds, proclaiming liberty of approach to all comers: Come, buy and eat, without money and without price; eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. The fruit offered by the god of this world, however fair and inviting in appearance, found at last to be only wormwood: 'the grapes of Sodom and the clusters of Gomorrha.'

II. *The* EXPERIENCE *related.* 'I sat,' &c. The very remembrance of an enjoyed Saviour sweet.

'What peaceful hours I then enjoy'd!
How sweet their memory still!'

The text expressive of repose and enjoyment. A beautiful illustration of faith in exercise. Exhibits—(1) Sense of exposure and weariness. (2) Discovery in Christ of what meets our case. (3) Trust in and appreciation of Him for the wants of our soul. (4) Feeling of security, peace, and satisfaction. (5) Continuance in such a state. Observe—(1) *Whatever Christ is, He is to be to us personally and experimentally.* In whatever aspect He is exhibited in the world, in that He is to be appropriated, embraced, and made use of. Entire confidence to be placed, and full complacency taken, in Him and in His finished work. As the apple tree, we are to sit down under His cooling shade, and partake of His refreshing fruit. Not enough to be near the shade, or to gaze upon the fruit. Without appropriation and personal use, men die even in sight of the Apple-tree. The awakened sinner to believe the testimony concerning Christ as a Saviour, and cordially to appropriate it for his own present and eternal benefit. (2) *The preciousness of Divine grace that has not only made such provision for our souls' necessities, but inclines and enables us to make use of it.* 'By grace ye are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God' (Eph. ii. 8).

'Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there's room?
While thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come.

'Twas the same love which spread the feast,
That sweetly drew me in;
Else I had still refused to taste,
And perished in my sin.'

(3) *Coming under the shadow of Christ for defence from the law's curse, we are invited to to sit down and partake of His fruit.* The fruit of the apple-tree for those who come under its shadow. Joy and comfort in Christ the immediate result of faith in His blood. So the awakened jailor rejoiced, believing in the Saviour preached to him by Paul and Silas. The believing Eunuch 'went on his way rejoicing' (Acts viii. 39; xvi. 34). (4) *Christ's fruit sweet to the taste of those who come under His shadow.* 'To you that believe He is precious.' A spiritual taste and a carnal one. As a man is, so is his taste. Truth in the proverb—each man to his taste. The taste of the carnal and unrenewed only carnal, and for the things that are seen and temporal—the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season. The taste of a man different from that of the swine at the swine-trough. A refined and cultivated taste the result of civilization, training, and education. The taste of a believer the result of regeneration and the impartation of a new spiritual and divine nature. Hence his taste for what is spiritual, divine, and heavenly, instead of what is only carnal and earthly. Unspeakable mercy to be blessed with a renewed nature and a spiritual taste. A man's misery to be left under the dominion of an earthly, carnal, and depraved taste. To such a taste Christ and heaven itself entirely without attraction. The place of torment the only future abode for a carnal taste. The object of the Holy Spirit's work to change a man's taste. Hence the first step in his conversion—conviction of his sin and misery, and the worthlessness of the world to a dying sinner and an immortal soul (John iv. 13, 14; Luke xv. 14—19). To a renewed soul and a spiritual taste, Christ and His salvation infinitely sweeter than the choicest pleasures of a perishing world.

Application. Has this been my experience? Is it so now? Have I seen my exposure, as a sinner, to Divine wrath, and fled to Christ for shelter? Have I appropriated Him as just the shelter I need; and am I now using and enjoying Him as such? Have I found delight in Him and in His salvation? Has His work of redemption and the word of His grace been sweet to my taste? Is it so now? All have their different tastes: what is mine? Is it spiritual or carnal? Christ or the world? Lord, give me a spiritual taste. Make Christ precious to me as a sinner, as He is to all that believe. Give me, as a *believing* sinner, to sit down under His

shadow with great delight, and to find His fruit sweet to my taste.

SHULAMITE'S HAPPY EXERCISE.

(Verses 4—6).

'He brought me to the banqueting-house,
And his banner over me was love.

'Stay me with flagons;
Comfort me with apples;
For I am sick of love.

'His left hand is under my head,
And his right hand doth embrace me.'

Shulamite describes her happy enjoyment of her Beloved's fellowship and love. Represents it under the figure of a banquet of wine. 'He brought (or hath brought) me into the banquet-house' (or house of wine). Such a banquet among the highest of earthly enjoyments. Hence queen Esther's invitation to the king (Esther v. 4—6). The king's love already declared by Shulamite to be 'better than wine.' She now realizes this to the full. Her longing desires after the enjoyment of his fellowship and love now fully gratified. She has found him whom her soul loved, and experienced intense delight in his presence. Observe—(1) *The soul that earnestly seeks Jesus, and the enjoyment of His fellowship and love, will not seek in vain.* 'Said I to the house of Jacob, seek ye me in vain?' 'Then shall ye seek me and shall find me, when ye search for me with all your heart.' (2) *The happiness in the enjoyment of Christ's presence and love, such as infinitely to compensate for all the labour and pains in seeking Him.* What it cost Shulamite to find her Beloved, forgotten in her happiness now that he is found. 'In Christ, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory' (1 Pet. i. 8) Notice, in regard to the

Banqueting House—

I. *The* EXPERIENCE *itself.* The nature of the 'banqueting house' or 'house of wine,' indicated in the words that follow: 'His banner over me was love.' Perhaps in allusion to some practice of suspending banderets with suitable mottoes or devices over the heads of honoured guests at entertainments; or to the burning cressets carried at the head of a marriage procession, to light the party to the banquet-house. The happy experience of the banqueting-house is the enjoyment of the King's presence, and of that love which is 'better than wine.' The greatest earthly happiness experienced in the fellowship and love of one whom we ourselves greatly love. The poetry of every country full of this sentiment. Love, the poetry of life; the wine and cream of existence. Jacob's hard service of seven years for Rachael seemed to him but a few days, 'for the love he bare unto her.' The banner that floats over the head of believers' in the fellowship of Jesus, a banner of 'love.' Its emblem 'a Lamb as it had been slain;' and its mottoes: 'He loved the Church, and gave Himself for it;' 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' This love-banner manifestly suspended over the disciples at the Last Supper. The same banner waving over every Communion Table. Love, the ground of all the Lord's dealings with His people. His love—(1) An electing love; (2) A redeeming love; (3) A covenanting or bridal love. The manifestation of Christ's love, the believer's feast. His loving presence a banquet of wine. The assurance of His love the believer's strength and joy in the battle of life.

'With Thee conversing, I forget
All time, and toil, and care;
Labour is rest, and pain is sweet,
If Thou, my Lord, art there.'

Heaven but the full bloom of this enjoyment. Christ's enjoyed presence and love the great attraction of Christian ordinances, especially of the Lord's Supper. The key-note in the Song of Solomon. The Song, like Psalm xlv., a 'Song of Loves.' The happiness in the enjoyment of Christ's love, and the language of the Song in describing it, perfectly natural. The naturalness of such language in the case of mere earthly love unquestioned. Why in the case of a Divine and spiritual one? Infinitely more in the God-man to fill the soul with delight in the enjoyment of His fellowship and love than in the loveliest, most loving, and most beloved creature. Mere creature love and creature loveliness, beside Christ's, a taper beside the sun. The love of the Man that is Jehovah's fellow, revealed in His thorn-rent brow, His nail-pierced hands, and His spear-wounded side. The language of each scar in His sacred body, love—love unspeakable, inconceivable; love of the most worthy to the most worthless; love of the Prince of the kings of the earth to a beggar on the dung-hill; love of the all-glorious Creator to the degraded creature; love of God to a contemptible worm, though a worm originally made after His own image, and capable of loving Him with the ardour of the loftiest seraph. This love and loveliness able to be apprehended, realized, and felt by the human soul, made at the same time deeply conscious of its utter unworthiness of it. The soul

capable both of enjoying that amazing love and of reciprocating it: and of experiencing, while so doing, a joy superior to that connected with any mere earthly love—a joy characterized by one who knew it as 'unspeakable and full of glory.' Such joy in Divine fellowship and love, man's normal experience as a rational creature in an unfallen state. The object of Redemption to restore man to its enjoyment; with the superadded element, that the Creator has, for man's sake, assumed his nature, and in that nature endured for his deliverance the awful curse incurred by his sin. Delight in the love and fellowship of a Divine Redeemer the experience even of Old Testement saints before that Redeemer became incarnate. Hence the impassioned language and longing of the 'sweet Psalmist of Israel': 'In His favour is life.' 'My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; Thy loving kindness is better than life; my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips, when I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate upon Thee in the night watches. 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God.' 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God' (Ps. xxx. 5; lxiii. 1, 3, 5, 6; xlii. 1; lxxxiv. 2). Isaiah sings: 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God' (Is. lxi. 10). Zephaniah exhibits the joy on both sides: 'Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord in the midst of thee is mighty: He will save; He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will joy over Thee with singing' (Zeph. iii. 14, 17). This joy in the Divine Redeemer and His love the experience of the early Christians. Raised them above the smiles and the frowns of the world, above the fear of torture and of death, of the lions and the stake. The experience of the Church in its times of greatest and spiritual prosperity, and of believers in their first-love and highest attainments in grace. Often specially realized by the Church and believers in times of suffering and persecution. The experience which gives such life, sweetness, and power to the hymns of Charles Wesley, the Moravian Brethren, and others. The 'banqueting-house' not confined to time or place; but especially found in the ordinances of God's house, and most of all in that of the Lord's Supper.

II. *The* AUTHOR *of the experience.* 'He brought (or, hath brought) me,' &c. The king recognized by Shulamite as not only preparing the banquet of love, but also bringing her to it. Her language that of amazement, admiration, gratitude, and joy. Our experience of the love and fellowship of Christ as our Bridegroom-Redeemer due entirely to Himself. Himself not only the Author of the bridal relation between Him and His people, but of their knowledge, acceptance, and enjoyment of it. The relation itself, with all the blessings connected with it, freely offered to men in the Gospel; but, apart from the grace of Christ, neither apprehended nor cared for. 'Who hath believed our report?' Wisdom hath mingled her wine, and furnished her table, and sent out her maidens with the invitation to the feast; but men reject the counsel of God against themselves, and begin to make excuse (Prov. ix. 1—3; Matt xxii. 2—6; Luke vii. 30). Blindness, carnality, pride and unbelief, only overcome by the same royal grace that spreads the feast. 'Why was I made to hear Thy voice?' &c. Christ brings to the banqueting-house—

1. By *His electing love.* 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.' His love an everlasting love, which in time lays hold of its object (Jer. xxxi. 3).

2. By *His renewing grace.* The carnal mind enmity against God, and so without any inclination to the banquet of His love. Its taste the swine-trough. Its enjoyment the creature, not the Creator.

3. By *His gift of faith.* Such amazing love to the worthless and undeserving not readily believed. Unbelief as to the freeness of the Gospel offer and the reality of Christ's love, to be removed by divine grace. This done by Christ Himself through His Spirit. Christ the Author as well as Finisher of our faith. His to give as well as 'increase' it. Exalted to give repentance, which includes it.

4. By *His conquest of the heart.* His people willing in the day of His power (Ps. cx. 3). Loved with an everlasting love, and, therefore, drawn with lovingkindness (Jer. xxxi. 3). Drawn with cords of a man, and with bands of love (Hos. xi. 4). His free, forgiving love, apprehended by faith, breaks and conquers the heart. The case of the woman in Simon's house. Her many sins freely forgiven. Hence she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little (Luke vii. 47, &c.)

5. By *helping the soul over every discouragement* in the way of its full enjoyment of Christ's fellowship and love, and preparing it, both by His providence and grace, for such enjoyment. So the woman 'that was a sinner' enabled to enjoy the banquet of love at Christ's feet even in the Pharisee's house.

6. By *pouring His love into the heart,* and

affording the rich realization of it through His Holy Spirit (Rom. v. 5). Christ able to speak comfortably (margin, 'to the heart') even in the wilderness. 'I will love them freely' (Hos. xiv. 4; ii. 14). So with the woman in Simon's house: 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.' Christ able to *tell* the soul, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love;' 'I have redeemed thee; thou art mine' (Jer. xxxi. 3; Is. xliii. 1).

III. *The* EFFECT *of the experience.* 'Stay (or support) me with flagons (or cordials—perhaps raisin-cakes); comfort me (or surround me—strew my couch) with apples (or citrons—fruits of reviving fragrance): for I am sick of (or faint with) love. His left hand is (or, let His left hand be) under my head, and His right hand embrace me.' Shulamite, overpowered by a sense of the king's love, and the happiness she enjoyed in his fellowship, calls as if for aid in her fainting state, to the 'daughters of Jerusalem,' or ladies of the Court, perhaps waiting at some distance; though probably intending only the king himself, as indicated in her concluding words: 'Let his left hand be under my head,' &c. The effect of her present rapturous enjoyment a sense of fainting, which requires the application of reviving cordials and odours, and the support of the king's own loving arms. 'I am sick of (or faint with) love,' implying—(1) Overpowering sense of present enjoyment in the king's love; (2) Inability to sustain more of it in present circumstances; (3) Need of support under it. The sense of Christ's love sometimes attended with similar effects on the physical system. The human frame often unable to endure unusually powerful emotions without sensible weakness and derangement as the result. The language of one under the sense of Christ's love: 'Stay Thy hand or the vessel will burst.' Mr. Flavel, under a similar enjoyment while riding on horseback, felt himself at length so weak as scarcely to be able to retain his seat, and discovered that the blood had been oozing from his limbs, and flowing into his boots. Two of the writer's own friends the subjects of a similar experience. Observe—(1) *That love must be precious, and the experience of it desirable, which can cause the soul to faint under the sense of it.* (2) *Such Divine love-sickness only relieved by more of that which is its cause.* The fruit of the Apple-tree alone able to cure the sickness it makes. The Bridegroom's own arms must support the soul fainting under a sense of His love. Such sickness followed by a blessed healing, both here and in a better world. (3) *Sense of Christ's love the highest enjoyment to be experienced on earth.* Such sense, enjoyed in a high degree, next door to the felicity of heaven. (4) *The soul filled with, and fainting under, Christ's love, languishes for the fuller enjoyment of His presence in heaven.* Full satisfaction only found where Christ is seen face to face. Love-sickness only on earth. Sense of Christ's love the most effectual means of weaning the affections from the world. The 'expulsive power of a new affection.' The love-sick soul only longs the more for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

> 'O Christ, He is the fountain,
> That deep, sweet well of love;
> On earth the streams I've tasted:
> More deep I'll drink above.'

(5) *Affecting contrast between sickness from Christ's love and surfeit from the pleasures of the world.* The former followed with a still richer manifestation of that love, but with an enlarged capacity for its enjoyment. The latter succeeded by an eternal thirst, with nothing to allay it (Luke xvi. 19—25).

THE KING'S CHARGE.

Verse 7.

I charge you,
O ye daughters of Jerusalem,
By the roes and by the hinds of the field,
That ye stir not up,
Nor awaken my love,
Till he (or till she) please.

Uncertain from the original whether the 'love' be Shulamite or the king, or simply the love itself as now experienced and enjoyed. Translators and commentators divided in opinion as to the speaker. The words probably spoken by the king in regard to his Beloved, now so happy in his love, or perhaps sunk into sleep by his side. The charge addressed to the daughters of Jerusalem, or ladies of the Court, in the language of oriental poetry. 'Roes and hinds' familiar objects in the country. Beautiful, but timid animals, ready to start up at the slightest noise. From their affectionate disposition suitably introduced in connection with a matter of love. A man's wife to be to him 'as the loving hind and pleasant roe (Prov. v. 19). Shulamite, Solomon's Beloved, not to be disturbed in the enjoyment of his love, or in the sleep which was occasioned by it. Observe, in regard to the

Enjoyment of Christ's Love,

1. *The temporary and uncertain duration of that enjoyment in the present world.* A limit to it so long as the Church is militant

on earth. The banneret of love to be soon exchanged for the banner of war. The feast to give place to the fight. The banquet-house to be followed by the battle-field. Believers soldiers of Christ as well as His Bride. The bridal chaplet to be laid aside for the warrior's helmet. The high enjoyment of the Bridegroom's love on earth may be temporary, but not the love itself. That enjoyment easily disturbed, like the repose of the timid gazelle. Intimate fellowship with Christ a tender, delicate, and sensitive thing. Numerous causes of disturbance both within and without us. Even necessary duty in the battle of life and the service of the Master may disturb it. Sin, self, and the seductions of the world, however, its main disturbers. Satan as great a foe to such enjoyment as to that of our first parents in the bowers of Eden. Heaven the place of undisturbed enjoyment.

2. *Great care necessary in order to preserve the enjoyment of Christ's love.* That enjoyment precious, as—(1) Endearing the Saviour; (2) Engaging us to His service; (3) Deadening us to the world; (4) Tending to crucify sin and increase holiness in the soul. The love of Christ constraineth us. The sense of it, therefore, to be carefully preserved. Hence the caution at the Supper Table: 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation: Continue ye in my love.' Important charge: 'Keep yourselves in the love of God,' that is, in the enjoyment of it (Jude 21). The sense and enjoyment of Christ's love only preserved by (1) Watchfulness against sin; (2) Obedience to His will; (3) Faithfulness in His service; (4) Patient endurance of the cross. 'If ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love' (John xv. 10). David and Peter lost for a time the *joy* of God's salvation through sin, but not the salvation itself. Care to be taken to preserve a tender and an unsoiled conscience. Especial care necessary in our intercourse with the world, and even with the professing Church. Danger even of the 'daughters of Jerusalem' disturbing our love. Believers to be most careful over themselves when they have been nearest to Christ.

3. *The desire of Jesus that His people may enjoy the continuance of His fellowship and love.* Exemplified at the Supper Table in the Upper Room. 'Continue ye in my love: These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full' (John xv. 9—11). His desire to come in and sup with believers, and they with Him (Rev. iii. 20). From no unkindness or unwillingness on His part if the enjoyment of His fellowship and love is not of longer continuance. Only necessity and duty compel the language: 'Arise, let us go hence' (John xiv. 31).

4. *A time when sensible enjoyment of Christ's love and fellowship may be safely and properly suspended.* 'Until he (or she) please.' A suspension necessitated after the enjoyment in the Upper Room, both on the part of Christ and His disciples. Christ obliged to leave the 'banqueting-house' to go and redeem His lost sheep; believers to be ready to leave it to go and reclaim them. Others, still without, to be invited and brought to the Marriage-feast with ourselves. The loving self-denial of the Master the best way to preserve the *assurance* of His love, and to secure the frequent repetition of the *sense* of it. The temporary suspension of our own enjoyment well repaid by the Saviour's joy over another lost sheep found. Our love to Himself to be evinced by our care for His lambs (John xxi. 15). His promise to His faithful and self-denying servants: 'I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice' (John xvi. 22). Christ most likely to be found again by us, when joining Him in His own loved employment—seeking and saving that which is lost. 'Feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.'

PART SECOND.

The Nuptials.

CHAPTER II. 8, TO CHAPTER III. 11.

SCENE FIRST. **Place:** *Shulamite's home in the country.* **Speaker:** *Shulamite alone with the Daughters of Jerusalem, or Ladies of the Court.*

NARRATIVE OF THE BRIDEGROOM'S VISIT.

Verses 8—13.

The voice of my Beloved!
Behold, he cometh,
Leaping upon the mountains,
Skipping upon the hills.
My Beloved is like a roe or a young hart:
Behold, he standeth behind our wall;
He looketh forth at the windows,
Shewing himself (glancing, like a rose bud) through the lattice.
My beloved spake and said unto me
Rise up, my love, my fair one,
And come away.
For lo! the winter is past;
The rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth:
The time of singing is come;
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.
The fig tree putteth forth her green figs;
And the vines, with the tender grape, (or, now in blossom), give a good smell.
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Shulamite relates the visit of her Beloved when he came to take her to the nuptials. The visit probably made in spring. The bridegroom's invitation, from its pleasant nature, poetically represented as a call to come forth and enjoy the beauties of that delightful season. The language implies a previous absence of the bridegroom. The believers most comfortable state on earth not abiding. Its interruption, however, subservient to higher advancement.—The parts of which the Song is composed appear to shift and melt into each other like the dissolving views of a diorama.

The text a poetical and allegorical representation of what takes place in the history of the Church as a whole, and in the experience of believers individually. Historically, the Church's experience—(1) At the return of the Jews from the captivity in Babylon; (2) At the time of the Saviour's incarnation and earthly ministry; (3) At any time of great revival in the Church—pre-eminently, at the commencement of the Gospel Dispensation on the Day of Pentecost, and at the Reformation in the sixteenth century. A time of the Church's

Revival,

a time of Spring. The voice of the heavenly Turtle-dove, like the harbinger of an oriental Spring, then heard in the land. The Gospel,—the voice and dispensation of the Spirit—then clearly and earnestly preached, and accompanied with the Spirit's own power. Sleepers awakened and the dead made alive. The anxious inquiry heard: What must I do to be saved? Sanctuaries thronged with thirsting hearers. Converts multiplied. Believers quickened—made holy, happy, and useful; bold in testifying for Christ, and their testimony blessed. The spirit of prayer—the voice of the Turtle-dove in the believer's heart—eminently poured out. Gatherings for prayer, numerous, lively, and largely attended. The fruits of the Spirit conspicuous. Love, peace, and goodwill prevailing in the Church and in the neighbourhood. Satan may rage, and some may persecute; but the believers are unmoved, rejoicing to walk 'in the footsteps of the flock,' and to be counted worthy to suffer shame for their Master's sake. Observe—A necessity laid on believers to pray for such a Spring-time to the Church and the world (Zech. x. 1).—The Church's experience farther indicated in the text—(4) At the time of the Saviour's second coming. The new heavens and the new earth then created. The whole creation, now groaning and travailing in pain together, then 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.' No more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain; 'for the former things are passed away' (2 Peter iii. 13; Rom. viii. 21; Rev. xxi. 4).

The experience of individual believers ex-

bibited—(1) At the time of their first enjoyment of Christ's manifested love; (2) At subsequent repetitions of the same; (3) In revived spiritual life and joy after a season of deadness and discomfort; (4) At their departure to the 'better country.'

There everlasting spring abides,
And never withering flowers.

The passage includes a lively and beautiful description of

Spring.

Spring the emblem of all that is sweet and lovely, joyous and refreshing. The spring in nature only a picture of the spring in grace, and still more of the spring in glory. Its lessons manifold:—

1. *That God is love.* This proclaimed in the months of spring from every wood and hedge-row, every field and garden. Sung by the lark as it soars in the air; hummed by the insect as it flits from flower to flower; whispered by the daisy that shows its smiling face again after the snows and storms of winter. Spring a continually recurring testimony that God delights in the happiness of His creatures.

2. *That He rules by His providence.* By His care, the creatures he has made are again provided with the means of support and comfort which seemed for a time to be suspended. Life bursts forth out of death, and plenty out of want. His hand looses the bands of winter by preserving the earth in its motion, and the sun in its power. He brings back the sweet influences of the Pleiades, and looses the bands of Orion (Job. xxxviii. 31).

3. *That God is faithful to his promises.* The time of the singing of birds comes, however long it seemed to be deferred. The voice of the turtle or cuckoo is again heard in the land, proclaiming that God is mindful of His promise that, while the world remains, seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, shall not cease (Gen. viii. 22). Weeping may endure for a night; joy, according to His promise, comes in the morning. 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.' (Ps. xxx. 5; cxxvi. 5). The fulness of the time arrives, and the Saviour appears.

4. *That God is the author of beauty.* Himself the perfection of beauty, He delights in imparting it to His creatures. Beauty the robe of Spring. Conspicuous everywhere,—in "the blue sky, green earth, and gleaming sea." The world not a mere granary. The hand that fills the ear with the full corn for man's food, clothes the grass of the field with beautiful flowers for man's enjoyment. The voice of spring: "How great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty!" (Zech. ix. 17).

An interesting feature of Spring is the return of the migratory inhabitants of the woods. More especially that of the herald of Spring—with us the cuckoo,—in Palestine,

The Turtle Dove.

'The voice of the turtle is heard in our land.'

The turtle-dove in the natural, an emblem of the Holy Ghost in the spiritual world. His chosen form, in descending on the Saviour at His baptism. Probable allusion to the figure in the account of the Creator (Gen. i. 2): 'The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters.' Literally, 'brooded,' as a bird over its young. 'Dove-like, sat'st brooding' (*Milton*). The dove an emblem of the Holy Spirit, as—(1) *Distinguished for its faithful love.* In love, the Spirit visits loathsome hearts, which He renews for His abode, and then never entirely leaves. (2) *The cleanest and most delicate of birds.* The least sin hateful and grieving to the Holy Spirit. Creates, in the soul He dwells in, the same holy hatred. (3) *A very timid creature.* A hawk's feather said to be sufficient to make it tremble. The Holy Spirit easily grieved, and creates in us a holy fear in regard to sin and spiritual danger. (4) *A gentle bird.* The gentleness of the Spirit seen in the gentleness of Christ, in whom He dwelt in His fulness. 'I am meek and lowly in heart.' 'He shall not strive nor cry. A bruised reed He shall not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench' (Matt. xi. 29; xii. 20). Among the fruits of the Spirit are—long-suffering, gentleness, and meekness (Gal. v. 22, 23). (5) *The turtle takes up its abode in the land renewed under the genial breath of Spring.* The Holy Spirit loves to dwell in the heart He renews by His own gracious influence. The believer's body as well as His soul the temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. iii. 16; vi. 19). Care to be taken by the believer to cherish so blessed a guest.

The 'voice' of the Holy Spirit 'heard in the land'—(1) *When the Gospel is preached in its purity.* The Gospel the Dispensation of the Spirit. 'The Spirit and the Bride say: Come.' 'As the Holy Ghost saith, To-day, if ye will hear His voice.' 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches' (Rev. ii. 11; xxi. 17; Heb. iii. 7). (2) *When the Gospel is preached with power.* The Gospel to be preached 'with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.' 'Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me' (1 Peter i. 12; Acts i. 8). (3) *When the fruits of the Gospel appear in the lives of those who hear it*

These fruits—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (or self control). Exemplified in the first hearers of the Gospel at Jerusalem, at Samaria, Philippi, Corinth, &c. (Acts ii. 44–47; viii. 8; xvi. 15, 33, 34; Phil. i. 3—7; I Cor. vi. 11). The voice of the turtle-dove never entirely silent in the earth since the first promise of a Saviour. Heard in the preaching of Enoch and Noah, in the Psalms of David, in the Proverbs and Song of Solomon, and in the strains of all the prophets. Carries in the Gospel the olive leaf of peace to a perishing but pitied world.

From the language of Shulamite in reference to her Beloved, observe—

1. *The warm affection of a believer's heart towards the Saviour.* 'The voice of my Beloved!' The first faint sound of His voice eagerly caught as it falls on the ear. Shulamite speaks as if her heart leaped within her at the sound. 'As soon as the voice of Thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy' (Luke i. 44). (2) *The waiting and expectant state of the believer in regard to Christ.* For His *first* Advent in the case of the Old Testament Church; His *second* Advent in that of the New; and His spiritual visits and appearances in the case of believers in general. Shulamite on the eager look out for her Beloved. The proper posture of believers in regard to Christ. His second and glorious Appearing the Church's 'blessed hope' (Titus ii. 13; Luke xii. 36). (3) *The love of Christ to His Church.* Shulamite's Beloved represented as coming to her, in the eagerness of his desire, like a swift and sprightly gazelle or young antelope, bounding over mountain and hill. No obstacle too great for Christ to overcome in redeeming and blessing His Church. 'He loved the Church and gave Himself for it.' Jacob's love to Rachael shewn by a hard service of fourteen years in keeping Laban's flocks. A human life of thirty-three years to fulfil the precepts of the law; and a painful, ignominious, and accursed death, with the added misery of the hiding of His Father's face, to satisfy its penalty—not too much for the love of Christ to His Church. 'Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not: then said I, lo, I come to do Thy will, O God; a body hast Thou prepared for me' (Ps. xl. 6, &c.; Heb. x. 5—9).

3. *The Saviour's desire for the believer's love and fellowship.* Shulamite's Beloved having reached her dwelling, waits outside till he obtains her consent to follow him. 'He standeth behind our wall,' &c. He addresses her by the most endearing titles, and employs arguments taken from the removal of every obstacle—'the winter is past,' &c.—and from the most attractive features of the country in the lovely season of an oriental Spring, as expressive of the sweetness enjoyed in the fellowship of love. Souls invited to receive and follow Christ by the blessedness imparted by His presence and love. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in unto him, and will sup with him, and he with me' (Rev. iii. 20).

4. *The natural backwardness of the heart to the blessedness to which Christ invites His people.* Shulamite's backwardness indicated by the arguments employed by her waiting Beloved to overcome it. The believer's spirit willing, while the flesh is weak. Weights hanging on the soul which have to be laid aside. The natural tendency, through the remains of the carnal mind, to settle down in a state of sloth and indolence, satisfied with little of spiritual life and communion with the Saviour. 'My soul cleaveth to the dust; quicken Thou me according to Thy word' (Ps. cxix. 25).

6. *The necessity of leaving everything for Christ.* Shulamite twice entreated 'to rise up and come away.' Like the exhortation addressed to the same Bride in the forty-fifth Psalm: 'Harken, O daughter, and consider: forget also thine own people and thy father's house' (Ps. xlv. 10, 11). The Saviour's call: 'Follow Me'—to be answered by a rising up, leaving all, and following Him (Matt. iv. 19—22; Luke v. 27, 28). 'Whosoever he be that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple' (Luke xiv. 33).

7. The whole passage descriptive of

The Saviour's Call.

I. *What it* COST *to make it.* Shulamite's Beloved required to come from a distance, overcoming every obstacle, 'like a roe or a young hind' bounding over one mountain peak after another. The Son of God required to leave His Father's house, assume our nature, empty Himself of His glory, take the form of a servant, be born of a humble woman, be brought forth in a stable, work as a carpenter, become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, be for a time with nowhere to lay his head, endure the contradiction, reproach, and opposition of sinners, and at last the hiding of His Father's face amid the agony and shame of an accursed death. One mountain of suffering and one valley of humiliation after another, to be passed before He could call sinners to the enjoyment of salvation,—His chosen bride to the celebration of the marriage. Many also the provocations to be come over in His saving call

to sinners, and His sanctifying call to believers, before He obtains their full consent to 'rise up and come away.' Jesus more eager to save and bless, than the sinner or the saint to experience His salvation and blessing (Ps. lxxxi. 10—16).

II. *The* MEANS *through which He addresses the call.* "The voice of my Beloved. He standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, showing himself (*margin*, 'flourishing'—glancing like an opening flower) through the lattice." Through these openings in the wall he addressed his invitation: 'My beloved spake and said unto me.' Through the ordinances instituted by Himself in His Church, Christ wooes sinners to become His Bride, and invites His Bride to the full enjoyment of union and communion with Him. 'We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God.' 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin unto Christ' (2 Cor. v. 20; xi. 2). The voice of Christ Himself in the word and ordinances the only effectual means of awakening and drawing the soul to Himself. 'My sheep hear my voice and follow me.' The quickened soul able to distinguish that voice as the voice of the beloved. "They know not the voice of strangers." The voice known to be that of the Saviour from its inward power and sweetness, and from its conformity to the written Word. Known by believers as having heard and experienced it before. Observe—(1) *A wall found standing between Christ and the soul whom He seeks.* Our fleshly nature, both in respect to body and mind, such a wall. The 'law of commandments' which we have broken, another. Visible nature at present a separating wall. Ordinances themselves a wall, but a wall with openings in it; or ordinances these openings themselves. Through these openings Christ shows Himself to the soul He seeks. (2) *To obtain glimpses of Christ and hear His voice, it is necessary to be at the lattice of ordinances.* Divine ordinances the meeting-place between Christ and His people (Ex. xxv. 22; xxix. 42, 43; xxx, 6, 36). 'Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the ports of my doors.' 'One thing have I desired, and that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and inquire in His temple.' 'Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst of them.' 'Wherever I record my name, I will come and bless you' (Prov. viii. 34; Ps. xxvii. 4; Matt. xviii. 20; Ex. xx. 24).

III. *The* ARGUMENTS *employed in the call.* Three arguments employed by Shulamite's Beloved. (1) His own love—expressed in the titles given her; (2) The removal of hindrances: 'The winter is past, the rain is over and gone;' (3) The joyful prospect before her—'The flowers appear on the earth,' &c. Jesus invites sinners to become His Bride, and His Bride to come forth to the full enjoyment of His fellowship on the ground of—

1. *His love to them.* His great argument with Israel His argument with believers and with sinners still: 'I have loved Thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.' 'I have redeemed thee; thou art mine.' 'Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you' (Jer. xxxi. 3; iii. 14; Is. xliii. 1). 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish.' 'The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.' 'Came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many' (John iii. 16; Luke xix. 10; Matt. xx. 28). Thus Jesus gained the woman at Jacob's well, and the sinner that washed His feet with her tears. The sinner's heart only thawed by a Saviour's love. The cords that draw the soul to Christ 'the cords of a man and the bands of love' (Hos. xi. 4). Only the revelation of redeeming love able to break down the barriers and undo the bolts of a sinner's heart. A loving voice heard outside before the door is opened within (Rev. iii. 20). None so fair in the eyes of Jesus as the penitent and believing soul (Luke xv. 5—7).

2. *The removal of hindrances.* The winter of a Legal Dispensation now past. The covenant of works superseded by a covenant of grace. 'Do this and live' exchanged for 'Believe and live.' Fulfilment of moral precepts and observance of ceremonial ordinances no longer a term of union with the Beloved. The invitation: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' 'Ho, every one that thirsteth; come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money; Come, buy and eat; without money and without price.' 'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely' (Matt. xi. 28; Is. lv. 1; Rev. xxii. 17). Divine justice that demanded the sinner's damnation now satisfied with the Surety's blood. The sword that should have smitten the guilty sheep bathed in the blood of the Shepherd, and so put back into its scabbard. The way prepared on the cross for a righteous reconciliation with God, and the full forgiveness of the sinner. God now able to be just while justifying the ungodly. A just

God now a Saviour. All things now ready for the salvation of the sinner, and his marriage with God's own Son (Zech. xiii. 7; Eph. ii. 13—16; Rom. iii. 21—26; Matt. xxii. 2, 4). Nothing wanting but the sinner's consent. 'Wilt thou go with this man?' 'To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God' (John i. 12).

3. *The joy and blessedness attending compliance.* 'The flowers appear on the earth, &c.' The soul invited by Christ to the joy and blessedness of an eternal spring, in the enjoyment of His society and love—in the new heavens of the new earth 'wherein dwelleth righteousness.' A rest remaining for the people of God, of which Canaan, clad in all the beauties of a lovely spring, was only a type. A time in prospect for the sinner that accepts the Saviour, when all the chill and gloom, the clouds and storms, the darkness and discomfort of the present state, shall give place to the sweetness and sunshine, the brightness and beauty, the light and gladness, of a land where the sun shall no more go down; where flowers that never fade bloom under cloudless skies; where the harps of angels and the songs of the Redeemed fill the air with celestial music, and where the tree of life bears its perennial fruit on both banks of the river that waters the Paradise of God. A 'better country' in prospect to every believing soul, where purity and peace, and joy and love—the voice of the heavenly turtle—is everywhere heard, and where the true Vine diffuses its fragrance, and with its precious clusters fills the happy inhabitants with 'a joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

III. *The* CALL *itself.* 'Rise up and come away.' The call addressed by the Saviour to His first disciples: 'Follow me.' In obedience to it, they 'rose up, left all, and followed him' (Matt. iv. 18—22; Luke v. 27, 28). The general law: 'Whosoever he be that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple' 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' 'Let us go forth unto Him, without the camp, bearing His reproach' 'Hearken, O daughter, and consider; forget all thine own people, and thy father's house: so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty' (Luke xiv. 33; Matt. xvi. 24; Heb. xiii. 13; Ps. xlv. 10, 11). The world to be given up in order to 'come away' with Christ. No man able to serve two masters of different interests and demands. 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' 'If the Lord be God, serve Him; if Baal be God, serve him.' A resolution and effort to be made to leave our present state in order to follow Christ. 'Rise up.' So the Prodigal Son: 'I will arise and go to my father,' &c. And he arose and went. The strength to arise is Christ's: the act and effort our own. So with the Paralytic: 'Take up thy bed, and go into thine house; and he arose and departed to his house' (Luke xv. 18, 20; Matt. ix. 6). Christ's call is—(1) To come *to* him; (2) To come *after* Him. We are to come *to* Him as *sinners;* to come *after* Him as *disciples.* The former verified by the latter. The blessing of coming *to* Christ realized in coming *after* Him. 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' followed by—'take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; and ye shall find rest to your souls' (Matt. xi. 28, 29). Unspeakable gainers in giving up all for Christ. Christ the One Pearl of great price that makes a man up for time and eternity. Everything, therefore, wisely given up to obtain possession of it. The case of Paul that of all believers: 'What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things,' &c. (Phil iii. 7, 8).

BRIDEGROOM'S SECOND CALL.

Verse 14.

O my dove,
That art in the clefts of the rock,
In the secret places of the stairs;
Let me see thy countenance,
Let me hear thy voice;
For sweet is thy voice,
And thy countenance is comely.

Love unwilling to take a refusal. Hence a repetition of the bridegroom's call. Strange backwardness on the part of a sinner to comply with the call of a Saviour. Backwardness on the part of a believer to follow Jesus to the enjoyment of a higher life of holiness and blessedness. In the Bridegroom's Second Call, observe—

I. *The* TITLE *of the Called one.* 'My dove.' A term of endearment. Love sees in its object only what is beautiful and agreeable. The called one a sinner, with much that is not dove-like. Yet love says: 'My dove.' Yet in regard to a believer, the title true. The believer is—(1) A '*dove,*' because renewed with a dove-like nature akin to that of Him who renews him and dwells in him—the Holy Spirit, whose emblem is the dove; the dove-like becoming the pre-

dominant one in him, and going on increasing until it reaches perfection and is the only one, and that for ever. Believers viewed and addressed by Christ in His love, according to their *new*, rather than their *old* nature. (2) *Christ's* dove, as—(i.) Given Him by the Father; (ii.) Purchased by His own blood; (iii.) Wooed and won by Him as His Bride, and made a member of His body. The little word '*my*' as precious to Christ in reference to believers as it is to believers in reference to Christ.

The Dove,

an emblem of believers, as it is—

1. *Helpless.* Unable to defend itself against birds of prey (Compare Ps. xviii. 17; Jer. xxxi. 11).

2. *Simple.* With as little wisdom as strength to defend itself. 'Ephraim is like a silly dove' (Hos. vii. 11). 'O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you that ye should not obey the truth' (Gal. iii. 1). Hence Paul's fear for the Corinthians (2 Cor. xi. 2).

3. *Timid.* Trembles at the sight of a hawk's feather. 'They shall tremble as a dove out of the land of Assyria' (Hos. xi. 11). Believers tremble at God's word. Afraid to sin, though not afraid to suffer (Heb. xi. 25).

4. *Sensitive.* 'They shall mourn love like doves in the valley.' The dove's note a mournful one. Believers sensitive to evils within and without them, about which others do not care. Concerned and troubled both for Christ's cause and their neighbour's souls. Sigh and cry for the abominations done in the land. Weep in secret places for the pride and destruction of others. Groan within themselves for the sins of their own nature and life. Their character and blessedness that they 'mourn,' and 'sorrow after a godly sort' (Matt. v. 4; 2 Cor. vii. 11).

5. *Beautiful.* Has 'wings covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold' (Ps. lxviii. 13). Believers to be made like them. Adorned with the beauties of holiness. Comely with Christ's comeliness put upon them.

6. *Cleanly.* Cleanly in its food, its feathers, and its nest. Believers called to be holy and without blame. Clean through the Word of Christ spoken to them. Purify themselves, as God is pure. Cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. Cleansed by the blood, and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ (1 John i. 7; 1 Cor. vi. 11).

7. *Harmless.* The dove's harmlessness proverbial. Believers made like Him who was 'holy, harmless,' &c. Their calling to be 'blameless and harmless, as the sons of God;' harmless in spirit, speech, and actions (Phil. ii. 15).

8. *Affectionate and faithful.* Pairs only with one mate. Mourns over its loss. Believers' love to Christ stronger than death. 'Follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.'

9. *The Bearer of Tidings.* Doves employed for this purpose. A species of pigeon distinguished by this name. Noah's dove. So believers the bearers of the glad tidings of the Gospel (Is. xl. 9; lii. 7; Ps. lxviii. 11; Mark xvi. 15).

10. *Often resorting to, and making their nest in the rocks.* A species named from this circumstance. Hence what follows—

II. *Their* PLACE *and* CONDITION. 'That art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs' (or precipices). Possible allusion to the retired seclusion in which Shulamite was kept in her mother's house; or to the sequestered situation of that house among the mountains. The description suggested by the title given: 'My dove.' Doves often found in the recesses of rocks. Indicates—

1. *Timidity.* The dove in the clefts of the rock from fear of her pursuers. Believers to pass the time of their sojourning here in fear. Work out their salvation with fear and trembling. 'The wise man feareth and departeth from evil,' while 'the fool rageth and is confident' (Ps. xiv. 16). Sufficient cause for 'fearing always,' in a corrupt nature within us, a roaring lion and subtle serpent without us, and a world lying in wickedness around us.

2. *Security.* The dove safe in the clefts of the rock. Believers safe in the Rock of Ages. Their place of defence the munitions of rocks. Jehovah Himself their refuge. Sheltered in Jesus, the enemy may harrass, but not hurt them. Sin may rage, but not reign in them. Men and devils may persecute and persuade, but not prevail against them. Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation (1 Peter i. 5).

3. *Isolation and loneliness.* Believers *in* the world, though not *of* it. Strangers and pilgrims. 'The world knoweth us not, even as it knew Him not.' Believers at present in this world as the Bride when the Bridegroom is taken away from her. Special times in their experience when they are 'as a sparrow alone upon the house-top' (Ps. cii. 7; xxxviii. 11). Hence the promise: 'I will not leave you comfortless (*margin*, 'orphans'); I will come to you' (John xiv. 18).

III. *The* CALL *itself.* 'Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice.' Christ's desire in regard to His Church in the world—(1) To enjoy their fellowship (Rev. iii. 20);

(2) To see them trustful, cheerful, and happy in Himself (Phil. iii. 1); (3) To witness in them the exercise of faith and love (Heb. xii. 2); (4) To enjoy their beauty—the reflection of His own—His own comliness which He has put upon them (Ps. xlv. 11). The believer's countenance, lighted up with faith and love, the fairest sight in heaven and earth to Christ, next to His Father. The weakest believer invited to a free and familiar intercourse with the Saviour. The believer's happiness, as well as the Saviour's joy, to turn his countenance fully and constantly towards Him. Nothing, not even sin, to be allowed to turn it away from Him when He lovingly invites him to turn it to Him. (5) To hear their voice (i.) In speaking *to* Him as well as *of* Him; (ii.) In cheerful song; songs given the believer even in the night—in painful and perilous, as well as pleasant and peaceful, times (Job. xxxv. 10; Ps. xlii. 8); (iii.) In thanksgiving and praise. To give thanks in everything, and to praise at all times, the will of God concerning us; (iv.) In confessing sin, and Jesus as a gracious and all-sufficient Saviour from it; (v.) In prayer and supplication—praying always and not fainting; in everything making their requests known unto God; coming boldly to the throne of grace through Him who is their elder brother and High Priest; casting their care upon Him who careth for them, and pouring out their hearts before Him. No situation or circumstances in which the soul should yield to the temptation of restraining prayer.

IV. *The* REASON *of the Call.* 'For sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.' The voice of a believer, though heard in groans and lamentations, sweeter to Jesus than the hallelujahs of angels. The voice of the child for whom He gave His life, and of the Bride whom He redeemed with His own blood. Sweeter still when heard in songs of faith and love, or in happy communion with Himself. The believer's countenance comely to Christ, though soiled with tears and dejected with sorrow. The Saviour's refreshment in Simon's house, not the viands on the table, but the woman at His feet with her countenance wet with the tears of penitence and love. The believing prayers and loving praises of a pardoned sinner sweeter to Christ than the songs of seraphim. The first cry of an awakened soul turns away his ear from the symphonies of heaven. His joy fulfilled, not in the angels that never fell, but in fallen and restored men. The joyous thanksgivings of redeemed sinners make the Son of God a double heaven. His joy of joys in the dead made alive again, in the lost one found. 'He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with singing,'—like the mother who sings for joy over her infant that lies smiling in her lap (Zeph. iii. 17). 'Hephzibah,' the name He gives to His saved people: 'My delight is in her' (Is lxii. 4).

SHULAMITE'S REPLY TO HER BELOVED.

(Verses 15—17.)

Take us the foxes,
The little foxes,
That spoil the vines;
For our vines have tender grapes.

My beloved is mine,
And I am his;
He feedeth among the lilies.

Until the day break
And the shadows flee away;
Turn my Beloved,
And be thou like a roe,
Or a young hart,
Upon the mountains of Bether.

Shulamite readily responds to her Beloved. Complies with His request to let Him hear her voice. Her song, a 'song of loves' (Ps. xlv. title). Expresses her desire and joy. Believers, encouraged and invited by Jesus, lift up their voice in prayer and song to the praise and pleasure of their Beloved. The privilege of 'the ransomed of the Lord' to return to Zion with songs. 'The inhabitant of the rock' sings; though lonely, yet secure and happy. Believers enabled, through faith and love, to sing the Lord's song even in a strange land (Ps. cxxxvii. 4). Shulamite's song a mirror of the believer's experience. Expresses—

I. CONCERN. 'Take us the foxes (or jackals), the little foxes, that spoil the vines; for our vines have tender grapes' (or, 'are in bloom'). Expresses her concern that nothing may exist to cool their love, or mar the happiness of the anticipated union. Speaks of herself as, in her bridal character, a vineyard, the property as much of her Beloved as her own. The vines of that vineyard, the happy intercourse of the connubial state. These, as in Spring, only then in bloom; the marriage not yet consummated, and the intercourse being only that of parties betrothed. The married state, however, anticipated, when for a time the vines would still only 'have tender grapes,' or be in flower. Natural concern in the Bride that nothing may disturb or mar the felicities of their married life. Wishes every hurtful and de-

turbing element to be detected and removed at the very beginning. Even 'the little foxes' to be taken and destroyed. Greater danger from infirmities of temper, little jealousies, coolnesses, or estrangements, at the earlier period of their wedded intercourse than even afterwards. The thought of the possible existence of such things painful to the loving Shulamite. To remove the causes and guard against the occasions of such disturbance, the joint care of both parties, while especially lying upon the husband. 'Take us the foxes.' Observe—

1. *Care to be taken to preserve unhurt the union and communion between believers and Christ.* The peace as well as fruitfulness of believers easily marred and injured. Grace in the soul, and Christ's presence in the Church, a tender and delicate thing. The Spirit easily grieved. Many foxes about the vineyard, both great and small. Injury to the Church as a whole, and to believers individually, from various causes. These apparent in the earliest period of the Church. Exhibited in the acts of the Apostles, the Epistles, and the Revelation. Appeared both in the form of false doctrines and foul practices. Believers, and the Church in general, warned against them. Care, vigilance, and decision necessary to guard against their entrance and effects.

2. *Errors in doctrine and sins in life to be especially guarded against in the Spring-time of grace, and in the revivals of the Church.* Spiritual pride, uncharitableness, vain-glory, strife, error, exclusiveness, to be then especially watched against. To be crushed in their first appearances and small beginnings. 'Take us the *little* foxes.' More dangerous and more damaging *then*, as being more likely to be overlooked, and more easily admitted. Young foxes more injurious to the vines in Spring than the older ones. What might be regarded as small sins, and scarcely observable to others, often the most hurtful to the divine life, and the spiritual health of a Church. 'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly,' &c. (Rev. ii. 4, 5).

3. *Sins and errors in the Church an injury to Christ as well as to the Church itself, and to individual believers.* 'Take *us* the foxes; *our* vines have tender grapes.' The purity, happiness, and fruitfulness of the Church, both collectively and individually, the common interest of Christ and His people. The Church Christ's body. His chosen rest and abode. His walk among the seven golden candlesticks. Injury to them an injury to *Him*.

4. *Christ and His Spirit's agency necessary to the preservation of the Church's purity and the believer's peace.* 'Take us (or 'for us') the foxes.' The Bride unable to do this herself. Believers 'kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation' (1 Pet. i. 5). Christ alone able to keep His people from falling, and to preserve them blameless. 'A vineyard of red wine: I the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day' (Is. xxvii. 2, 3). Without me ye can do nothing. My grace is sufficient for thee. The Church's efforts made effectual by the Spirit's agency. 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts' (Zech. iv. 6). Little speed in soul-matters without Christ's hand in the work.

5. *The believer's duty and interest prayerfully to put the preservation of his own soul, and of the Church at large, into Christ's hands.* 'Take us the foxes'—the Bride's earnest prayer to the Bridegroom. Paul's conduct in regard to the thorn in the flesh: 'For this I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me' (2 Cor. xii. 8). Arise, plead thine own cause. What Christ can do, and has promised to do, He will do at His people's earnest prayer (Ezek. xxxvi. 37; Is. xlv. 11; Matt. ix. 38.) Prayer the mightiest weapon put by her Lord into the Church's hand, for the preservation of her purity and the conquest of her foes. Believers' duty both to work and pray. 'We will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word' (Acts vi. 4). The Church's greatest triumphs won upon her knees.

II. Joy. 'My beloved is mine and I am His.' Shulamite expresses her joy in the possession of her Beloved, and in the entire surrender of herself to him as his own. This joy enhanced by the consideration of what he is and does—the excellence of his character, the happiness he imparts to his own, and the pleasure he takes in their society. 'He feedeth among the lilies.' The Beloved compared to a noble and beautiful gazelle that pastures only in the flowery meads. Only purest joys the Saviour's choice. Only the pure His companions and friends. Purest enjoyments attend His presence. Lilies spring and bloom at His steps. Hence the believer's joy and thankfulness. Justly congratulates himself on his untold treasure. 'To you that believe He is precious.' 'The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places: I have a goodly heritage: the Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup.' 'My soul shall make her boast in the Lord.' 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be very joyful in my God.'

'The opening heavens around me shine,
With beams of sacred bliss,
When Jesus tells me He is mine,
And whispers I am His.'

Observe—

1. *A real, complete, and lasting propriety in each other on the part of Christ and believers.* Each, with all that he is and has, the property of the other. The humblest and poorest believer equally with the strongest and richest, the sharer of Christ and all that is His—His life, merits, death, resurrection, glory, power, kingdom, throne (Rom. viii. 17; Rev. iii. 21). The believer entirely Christ's—his affections, talents, powers, possessions, influence. The name of King Jesus stamped on all he has and is. 'Holiness to the Lord' engraven on the furniture of his house and the tools of his workshop.

2. *The believer's happiness that Christ is his and he is Christ's.* Christ such as to guarantee this happiness. 'He feedeth among the lilies.' His presence makes a Paradise to angels, still more to His redeemed. 'Where thou art is heaven.' Infinitely blessed Himself, He is able to make all blessed who are the object of His love. The special blessedness of the glorified, that the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, that the Lamb stands on Mount Zion in the midst of the redeemed, and that He appears even in heaven as a Lamb that 'had been slain' (Rev. v. 6; vii. 17; xiv. 1).

3. *The proper character of believers to be lily-like.* 'He feedeth among the lilies.' Lilies the emblems of sweetness and purity. Descriptive of those among which the Holy and Fair One delights to dwell. The spotless and lovely One can only feed among lilies. He who is sweetness and beauty itself must have lilies for His companions and joy. This fact the guardian of the believer's life and the security of his peace. To enjoy Christ and His fellowship we must be lilies. Christ only able to live in a pure heart (Matt. v. 8; Tit. ii. 14; 1 John iii. 3).

4. *Christ to be found among His people.* 'He feedeth among the lilies.' Is to be found among such (ch. vi. 2). 'Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' 'He that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks' (Matt. xviii. 20; Rev. ii. 1). Christ still to be sought and found in the temple—His own body, the Church. Found sitting, not in the midst of proud Pharisees and captious Scribes, but among His humble disciples, and the 'publicans and sinners' that draw near to hear Him (Luke xv. 1; Is. lxvi. 1, 2; lvii. 15; Acts vii. 48).

III. Desire. 'Till the day-dawn (or breathe), and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved,' &c. Shulamite's desire, probably, for the day of the anticipated nuptials, and her Bridegroom's frequent visits in the meantime. The day longed for that shall make her legally and publicly his own, and shall put her in possession of the happiness and privilege of his married wife. The day of the Lord's second appearing that of the public nuptials of His Church. The espousals or betrothing, here; the marriage, hereafter (2 Cor. ii. 2; Rev. xix. 7). The Bride not complete till the Bridegroom comes to be glorified in His saints and to make them all like Himself (2 Thess. i. 10; Phil. iii. 20, 21). That day the object of the believer's longing. The blessed hope (Tit. ii. 13). The day looked for and hasted to (2 Peter iii. 12). The speedy arrival of that day the last promise of the Bridegroom to His Church, and the last prayer of the Bride to her Beloved (Rev. xxii. 20). That day the termination of the Church's night. With the Bridegroom's advent the day dawns and the day star appears. Christ Himself the bright and morning star (Rev. xxii. 16; 2 Per. i. 19; Rom. xiii. 12; viii. 18—23). His first advent the termination of the night of the legal dispensation; His second that of the present one (Luke i. 78). Meantime He visits and revives His people. 'I will not leave you comfortless (orphans); I will come unto you.' Such visits their comfort and joy in the night of their pilgrimage (Ps. xvii. 3; xlii. 8; Job. xxxv. 10). Christ, in His love, like a roe, or a young hart bounding over the mountains of Bether (or of cliffs intersected with deep fissures and ravines), when coming in humiliation and weakness; no less so when coming in glory and power. Intervening events and epochs to transpire previous to His second as well as to His first advent Perhaps the last of these mountains of Bether already reached, or soon to be so. The Lord hasten it in His time!

The Missing One Found.

Chapter III. Verses 1—5.

Probably a Dream Related by Shulamite to the Daughters of Jerusalem.

By night on my bed
I sought him whom my soul loveth;
I sought him, but I found him not.

I will rise now, and go about the city;
In the streets, and in the broadways
thereof,
Will I seek him whom my soul loveth.
I sought him, but I found him not.

The watchmen that go about the city
found me; *to whom I said:*
Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?

It was but a little that I passed from them,
But I found him whom my soul loveth.

I held him, and would not let him go,
Until I had brought him into my mother's
house,
And into the chamber of her that con-
ceived me.

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusa-
lem,
By the roes and by the hinds of the field,
That ye stir not up nor awake my love,
Till he please.

This section probably the narration of a dream, given in a song by Shulamite in presence of the Daughters of Jerusalem or Ladies of the Court. 'By night (*Hebrew*, 'nights') on my bed,' &c. (So Dan. iv. 10, 13). 'A dream cometh by the multitude of business;' and Shulamite's, from the occupation of her thoughts with the prospect of the approaching nuptials, and the preparations for them. Indicates how her waking thoughts were possessed by her Beloved, here again characterized by her as 'he whom my soul loveth,' as already in Chap. i. 7; and reveals her great desire to enjoy his society, and her fear lest anything should occur to prevent it. From the passage, viewed in its spiritual aspect, observe—

1. Natural that believers, especially in the ardour of their first love, should have their thoughts much occupied with Christ, and that as a consequence He should be present to them even in their dreams. Their experience expressed by the prophet: 'With my soul have I desired Thee in the night: yea, with my spirit within me will I seek Thee early' (Is. xxvi. 9).

2. The believer's great desire, when it is well with his soul, for the presence and fellowship of the Saviour whom he loves; and his great concern not to lose it, or do anything that may occasion its loss.

3. Times when the believing soul is warranted and constrained to open up to others the treasures of her spiritual experience, and to narrate both her conflicts and her victories, her sorrows and her joys (Ps. lxvi. 16).

4. The fellowship of Christ not always and uninterruptedly enjoyed by the believer in this world. Many causes of its interruption—a corrupt nature, a tempting devil, and a world lying in wickedness.

5. Dark seasons and dull frames no proof of a Christless state. Christ always present with a believer, but not always sensibly so. Our union with Christ not affected by our want of communion with Him. Our interest in His love not dependent on our feelings, but on His faithfulness.

6. A precious mercy to be aroused to seek an absent Christ.

7. The mark of a living and loving soul, not to be satisfied with an absent Saviour.

8. Seeking Christ to be diligent and earnest, in order to be successful. The soul to stir itself up to take hold of God when He appears to be absent (Is. lxiv. 7). Christ not always readily found when missed. Not readily found in order to increase our earnestness in seeking, and our carefulness in retaining Him. A missing Christ makes prized ordinances.

9. Suitable means to be employed and inquiry made, in order to find a missing Christ. The part of a true pastor to direct inquiring souls. That direction to be sought and found both in private conference and in attendance on the public ordinances of God's house (John xii. 21; Ps. xxvii. 4). The likeliest place to find the missing Jesus was in His Father's house (Luke ii. 46). 'Christ to be found in the streets and broad ways of the city, not in the blind by-ways outside of it.'—(*Henry*).

10. Ministers to know Christ themselves in order to direct others to Him. A Christless minister a poor guide to a Christ-seeking soul. Ministers expected by their people to be familiar with Christ, and with the exercises of those who are earnestly seeking Him.

11. Ministers to be accessible to their people, and to be diligent in their duty 'The watchmen that go about the city found me.'

12. Earnest and diligent search after Christ not long unsuccessful. 'It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found Him,' &c. Christ not far from a faithful ministry and an earnestly seeking soul.

13. Means to be employed, but not rested in. 'I passed from them.' The seeking soul to go *beyond* the minister. Means and ministers, like finger-posts, pointing to something beyond them. Ordinances only *means*. Angels unable to satisfy Mary at the empty sepulchre. The Bride hastens past the servant to the master.

14. Inexpressible joy in finding a missing and sought-for Saviour. 'I found Him'—the language of exultation. Like Archimedes in the bath—'I have found it, I have found it.' So Andrew and Philip in regard to the Messiah (John i. 41, 45). So the wise men rejoiced in the Star (Matt. ii. 10).

15. Care to be taken by those who have found Christ in order to retain Him. 'I held him,' &c. The language—(1) Of love and affection to the Saviour (Ruth i. 16) (2) Fear and jealousy of losing Him. (3) Earnest resolution to hold Him. Implies on Christ's part—(1) An apparent inclination to depart (Gen. xxxii. 26; Luke xxiv. 28; Mark vi. 48). (2) Gracious condescension—the Almighty allowing Himself to be held by a creature.

16. Believers who find Christ, and enjoy His fellowship, to endeavour that others also may profit by it. 'I brought him to my mother's house.' Both natural and spiritual kindred to be made partakers of the benefit. A proof that Jesus is dear to ourselves when we seek to make Him known to others. A family or congregation to be the better by any member of it that rejoices in a found Saviour. Only a present and enjoyed Christ the life of a Church or congregation.

17. Watchfulness, resolution, and care necessary, on the part of the believer, to avoid whatever may disturb his enjoyment of Christ's presence and fellowship; and on the part of the Church, to avoid whatever may grieve him away from its ordinances. 'I charge you,' &c. Danger of disturbing a found and present Christ especially to be apprehended from the 'daughters of Jerusalem.' The flesh Christ's greatest enemy, whether in the believer's own heart or in the Church or congregation.

18. Easy to provoke Christ to withdraw from the soul or the Church while He is visiting it. 'By the roes and by the hinds of the field,'—the most timid creatures, and most easily disturbed and frightened away.

Observe from the whole passage in regard to

A Missing Saviour.

I. *The* PERSON *who misses him.* One who loves him. 'I sought him whom my soul loveth.' The character of a believer and a regenerated soul that he loves Christ. He loves Him—(1) *Sincerely*, with his 'soul;' not in mere sentiment or profession. (2) *Ardently*, with warmest affection; his 'soul' loves Him. Christ loved with the '*soul*' the proof of a soul that loves Christ. Christ only loved by a new nature. The carnal mind enmity to God, and so to Christ. Love to Christ generated by the Holy Spirit's revelation of him to the soul in his preciousness as a Saviour. The soul that loves Christ most ready to miss Him, and most pained at losing Him. That only missed which has been prized and possessed. The condemnation and curse of men who have heard the Gospel that they do not love Christ (John iii. 19; 1 Cor. xvi. 22).

II. *The* MEANS *employed to find him.* (1) *Diligent attendance on public ordinances.* These ordinances the 'streets and broadways' of the city of the great King. Christ to be found in these. 'Wherever two or three are gathered together,' &c. (Matt. xviii. 20). 'Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, &c. For whoso findeth me, findeth life,' &c. (Prov. viii. 34, 35). (2) *Private inquiry of spiritual guides.* Pastors and teachers appointed by Zion's King to direct anxious souls to Himself. 'Remember them which have the rule (*margin*, are the guides) over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God,' &c. (Heb. xiii. 7, 8, 17). (3) *Searching the Scriptures.* The written Word the standing direction of inspired guides. The voice of the watchmen of Zion heard in the Bible. The Scriptures testify of Christ. None long in finding Christ who search for Him in the 'testimony of the Gospel.' (4) *Earnest prayer for divine light and guidance* (Ps. xliii. 3). Shulamite turns from the watchmen to the King himself (verse 4).

III. *The* RESULT *of the search.* Christ found. 'I found him whom my soul loveth.' Such success is (1) *certain.* Promised by Him that cannot lie. 'Then shall ye seek me and find me, when ye search for me with all your heart' (Jer. xxix. 13). 'If thou criest after knowledge, &c. Then shalt thou find the knowledge of God' (Prov. ii. 3—5. (2) *Speedy.* 'It was but a little,' &c. 'Before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear' (Is. lxv. 24). 'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, &c. My bowels are troubled for him.' (Jer. xxxi. 18—20).

IV. *The* IMPROVEMENT *of the success.* Threefold. (1) *A holding him fast*, so as not again to lose Him. 'I held Him, &c. That likely to be most carefully treasured and kept which has been once lost and found again. A believer not more known by finding Christ than by his care to keep Him when He is found. Care to be taken to retain a mercy as well as to obtain it. Care to retain Christ as precious in his sight as anxiety to obtain Him. And equally necessary. Enough in the world, the flesh, the devil, and the carnality of the 'daughters of Jerusalem,' to render such care necessary. (2) *An endeavour to make others partakers of the blessing.* Our mother's house to share the benefit of a found Christ. A living believer rejoicing in a found Christ, a blessing to a whole congregation. The found treasure not to be hid. 'Many shall see it, and fear and trust in the Lord.' 'Come and hear, All ye that fear God; and I will declare

what he hath done for my soul' (Ps. xl. 3; lxvi. 16). Our kindred not to be forgotten. 'Go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee' (Mark v. 19). (3). *Watchfulness and resolution to guard against anything that might shorten Christ's fellowship and presence* 'I charge you,' &c. Spiritual blessings to be held with a vigilant eye and a resolute hand. A cooling of first love sufficient to grieve a loving Saviour, and to endanger the continuance of the 'candlestick' (Rev. ii. 4, 5).

The Marriage Procession.

Scene Second. **Place:** *A street in Jerusalem, with a royal Litter, guarded by a company of soldiers, seen in the distance.* **Speakers:** *Citizens of Jerusalem.*

Chapter III. 6—11. Verses 6—8.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness,
Like pillars of smoke,
Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
With all powders of the merchant?

SECOND CITIZEN.

Behold his bed, which is Solomon's:
Threescore valiant men are about it,
Of the valiant of Israel.
They all hold swords,
Being expert in war;
Every man hath his sword on his thigh,
Because of fear in the night.

THIRD CITIZEN.

King Solomon made himself a chariot
Of the wood of Lebanon;
He made the pillars thereof of silver,
The bottom thereof of gold,
The covering of it of purple,
The midst thereof being paved with love
For the daughters of Jerusalem.

The question probably asked by one citizen or company of citizens, and answered by another in reference to the Bridal Palanquin and Procession seen advancing towards Jerusalem from the country. Marriage processions in the East accompany the Bride on her way from her own dwelling to the house of the Bridegroom or his father; the Bride herself being concealed by a curtained canopy, called the *Huppah*, borne by four men holding it by a pole at each corner. The procession, accompanied by parties of musicians, generally occupies three or four hours or more, moving slowly, and taking a circuitous route for the sake of display, while aromatics are frequently burnt in honour of the occasion. When the procession is at night, it is to accompany the Bridegroom—usually to and from some house of prayer—and is then illuminated by torches or burning cressets, and other lights fixed at the top of poles, and carried by men on their shoulders, the inhabitants of the place usually pressing out into the streets to enjoy the sight. The name of Solomon connected in the context with the title of King, a sufficient indication that it is the marriage of Solomon, the king of Israel, that forms the picture or emblem in the allegory. His anticipated espousals with Shulamite now about to take place. The procession attracts the notice of the citizens of Jerusalem, who are able to discern it at a distance, and make their remarks to one another. 'Who (or what) is this,' &c.? The scene recalls the inquiry of the same citizens when Jesus, a few days before His crucifixion, made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, amid the acclamations of the multitude: 'Blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord' (Luke xix. 38). 'All the city was moved, saying, Who is this?' (Matt. xxi. 10). The inquiry in the text, and the description in reply to it, applicable rather to the Bridal Couch, Litter, or Palanquin, including at the same time the party conveyed in it. Exhibits, under various aspects, the Church or believer, as the

Bride of Christ.

1. *Coming up from the wilderness.* Believers chosen out of the world. *In* it, but no longer *of* it. Like Israel, the typical and Old Testament Bride, coming up out of Egypt and the wilderness to Canaan. A wilderness between the Bride of Christ and

her heavenly home. While others take up their abode in it, the Bride makes her way out of it. The mark of Christ's Bride that she seeks 'a better country,' has her 'conversation (or citizenship) in heaven,' and sets her 'affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God' (Heb. xi. 16; Phil. iii. 20; Col. iii. 1).

2. *Perfumed.* Believers possessed of a two-fold perfume: (1) The *merits of the Bridegroom.* Made accepted in the Beloved. Christ made to those who are in Him wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, as well as redemption (1 Cor. i. 30). Christ Himself the divine merchant, from whom the heavenly aromatics are to be obtained. 'I counsel thee to buy of Me.' 'Buy without money and without price.' The Lord well pleased 'for *His* righteousness sake.' The 'much incense' added to the prayers of believers by the Angel of the Covenant, who presents them to the Father (Rev. viii. 3). Believers wrapped in the perfumed garments of their Elder Brother, and so obtain the blessing (Gen. xxvii. 15, 27). (2) *The graces of the Spirit.* Those who are Christ's possess His Spirit. Have put on Christ. Receive out of His fulness grace for grace. Believers made fragrant both to God and man by the fruits of the Spirit produced in them—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, &c. (Gal. v. 22, &c.). The works of faith and services of love performed by believers through the Holy Spirit in them, a sweet smelling savour to the Lord (Phil. iv. 18). The spiritual perfume that anointed the King shed also upon His Bride (Ps. cxxxiii. 2).

3. *On their way to the marriage Supper of the Lamb, and the home prepared for them by the Beloved.* Like Shulamite, on their way to the nuptials to be celebrated in the New Jerusalem, when the Bridegroom comes 'to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe' (2 Thes. i. 10). The heavenly Bridegroom gone to prepare a place for His Bride in His Father's house, and in due time to come again, and receive her to himself (John xiv. 2). Believers at His coming caught up to 'meet the Lord in the air,' and so are 'for ever with the Lord' (1 Thes. iv. 17). The public reception and presentation of them to the Father, as His Bride, to be followed by the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. xix. 7—9).

4. *A spectacle and object of interest to angels and men.* Into these things the angels desire to look. To principalities and powers in the heavenly places is made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God (1 Pet. i. 12; Eph. iii. 10). Believers, living as such, the object of attention, if not of attraction, to the world around them. 'They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.' The remark of the heathen in reference to the early believers: See how these Christians love one another! The people 'magnified' the Pentecostal Church at Jerusalem, while unbelievers were afraid to 'join themselves unto them' (Acts iv. 13). Believers made conspicuous by their heavenly deportment, as far as they possess the spirit of their Master, and live in His fellowship. Spiritually-minded Christians a marvel and a mystery to their fellow men. 'Men wondered at.' Christian and Faithful passing through Vanity Fair, gazed and wondered at 'as outlandish men.' Believers, as such, unlike the world in their principles, practice, spirit, views, experiences, hopes. The difference, that between the flesh and the spirit. Believers, as such, both *un*known and *mis*known by the world (1 Cor. ii. 15; 1 John iii. 1). The Church of believers going up from the wilderness, compared to

'Pillars of Smoke.'

1. *Pillars or columns of smoke have an upward motion and tendency.* Their direction towards heaven, whither they are constantly ascending. So believers, risen with Christ, seek the things that are above. The part of a believer to have his affections, desires, aims, hopes, &c., on things above. 'Our conversation is in heaven. Their heart where their treasure is.

2. *Such columns seen at a considerable distance.* Believers a city set on a hill. Lights in the world. Men to be able to see their good works, so as thereby to glorify their Father in heaven. The world to be able to take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus. 'Epistles of Christ known and read of all men.' The heavenward aims and heavenly life of believers, that which makes them most observed by a world which only 'minds earthly things.'

3. *Yet the foundation of these pillars invisible.* The smoke ascends from a fire which is unseen. In the Allegory, the smoke probably that ascending from the incense burned as the procession advanced. The source of a believer's spiritual and heavenly life hidden from the eyes of the world. That source Christ Himself, and the fire of His Spirit in the heart. 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' 'Not I, but the grace of God which was with me.' 'Your life is hid with Christ in God.' A hidden fire, kindled by the Holy Ghost, burns in the believer's heart. The smoke seen, but not its source.

4. *Such pillars constant and continuous in their ascent.* The believer's spiritual life and heavenward aim habitual and abiding. Not

existing for a day or a month, but through life. The path of the just as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day (Prov. iv. 18). The believer no mere Sabbath-day saint. The mark of a false heart to serve God on Sundays, and the world during the rest of the week. Believers not heavenly in the Church, and earthly in the ball-room. A man known not by what he is sometimes, and by fits and starts, but what he is habitually. A Christian discovered, not by temporary feelings or spasmodic acts, but by the even tenour of his way (John viii. 31).

5. *Yet their ascent not always uniform and unaisturbed.* The column of smoke always ascending, yet subject to agitation and disturbance from the wind. The spiritual life of a believer not always alike, either in appearance or experience. Subject to disturbing influences, both from within and without. Such influence, natural corruption; the daily trials and temptations of life; the unwearied efforts of an invisible enemy. The work of a believer's life to guard his spirit against these influences, and to preserve the heavenward tendency of his thoughts and affections, and the heavenly character of his temper and conduct.

Solomon's Bed or Bridal Palanquin.

'Behold his bed, which is Solomon's, &c.

The 'bed,' litter, sedan or palanquin, probably the same as the 'chariot' described in the subsequent verses. Prepared by Solomon for himself; that is, for the conveyance of his Bride from her father or mother's house to his own, where the nuptials were to be celebrated; and perhaps for the conveyance of himself on the same occasion. Guarded, as became a royal marriage, by an escort of the king's select troops, to prevent either danger or disturbance by the way; especially as the journey required to be made, in part at least, during the night. May be viewed as emblematic of

The Covenant of Grace,

as administered both in the Old and New Testament dispensations; in the former, through a system of typical ordinances, including a typical priesthood and a typical tabernacle and temple, (these last perhaps specially referred to by the 'bed' and 'chariot,' —the same, and yet in some respects different,) accompanied with a succession of inspired prophets; in the latter, by means of spiritual ordinances and various gifts of the Spirit, with the ministration of divinely instituted office-bearers, some extraordinary and temporary, as apostles and prophets; others ordinary and permanent, as evangelists, pastors and teachers. The Covenant itself, in substance, that made with Abraham: 'I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee.' Circumcision appointed to him and his natural male offspring, as the sign or token of the covenant; 'a seal of the righteousness which he had by faith;' afterwards, in the New Testament Church, replaced by the simpler rite of Baptism. The Covenant made with David: 'He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things; and sure' (2 Sam. xxiii. 5), offered to all in the Gospel: 'Incline your ear and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David' (Is. lv. 3). Proclaimed by Peter on and after Pentecost: 'The promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call.' 'Ye (Jews) are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed' (Acts ii. 39; iii. 25). Called a New Covenant, as under a new administration, and especially as distinguished from that made with Israel as a people at Mount Sinai. Promised as a New Covenent by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. xxxi. 31, &c.). The promise applied by Paul to the time subsequent to the death and ascension of Christ (Heb. viii. 4—13). The covenant sealed by the blood or death of Jesus. The cup in the Lord's Supper, symbolical of that blood, called by Himself the 'cup of the New Testament (or Covenant) in my blood.' Its special blessings,—divine teaching, pardon, adoption, and sanctification (Heb. viii. 10—12). Hence, called a better covenant, and established upon better promises than that made with Israel at Mount Sinai (Heb. viii. 6). Christ the Mediator and Surety of the Covenant (Heb. vii. 22; viii. 6; ix. 15; xii. 24). The covenant made with all who are saved, on their believing in Jesus and accepting the Gospel offer. Believers hence called 'Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise' (Gal. iii. 29). Observe, in relation to the 'bed' or 'chariot'—

1. *It was made by Solomon himself.* 'Solomon made himself a chariot.' Christ the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant ratified and its blessings procured by His atoning death. The Covenant offered by Him in the Gospel, and made by Him with all who believe and accept of it (Is. lv. 3). The whole of its administration in the New Testament dispensation, with its ordinances, offices, and gifts, directly from Him as the

Church's Head (Eph. iv. 7—11; Matt. xxviii. 18—20; 1 Cor. 11, 23).

2. *Made by Solomon for himself.* 'Made himself a chariot.' The special object of it the comfortable conveyance of his Bride to her future home. The covenant of grace devised by a Triune God, the Son as well as the Father and the Spirit, for the salvation of the Church, given to the Son as His Bride. The ordinances, gifts, and offices, for the gathering in, building up, and perfecting of the redeemed (Eph. iv. 12; v. 25—28). Christ's glory connected with the salvation of His Church (John xvii. 1, 2).

3. *Well guarded.* The chariot, with the Bride in it, during its passage through the wilderness, accompanied by a chosen guard of military, well armed, and of dauntless courage, 'because of fear in the night.' 'The period of the Church's passage through this world to her heavenly home a time of 'night'—of darkness, danger, and discomfort. Hence placed by her divine Lord under the escort of an angelic guard. 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.' Angels that excel in strength,—'ascending and descending upon the Son of man,'—sent forth 'to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation' (Heb. i. 14; John i. 51). Hence the death of a persecuting Herod (Acts xii. 1—23). The Church placed also under the care of those to whom it is given to watch for their souls 'as those that must give account' (Heb. xiii. 17). Such set for the defence of the Gospel, that its truth may continue with the Church in its purity and integrity, and by the skilful use of the 'sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,' to contend earnestly 'for the faith once delivered unto the saints' (Phil. i. 17; Gal. ii. 5; Jude 3).

4. *Worthy of its author and object.* 'Made of the wood of Lebanon'—cedar, both durable and fragrant. Its 'pillars of silver,' supporting the canopy at its four corners. Its 'bottom,'—seat for reclining on, or back for leaning against,—of gold. Its 'covering' or hangings, of purple or scarlet. Its 'midst,' or bottom, paved with love, for (or by) the daughters of Jerusalem,'—covered with a carpet, probably adorned with embroidered love-emblems and mottoes, the work of the hands of the Ladies of the Court.—The Covenant of Grace an 'everlasting covenant.' The ordinances by which it is administered, for perpetual observance till the Lord's second appearing. His presence with His Church and servants in the administration of it, 'even unto the end of the world.' The Lord's Supper to be observed until He Himself shall come. The ordinances of the Old Testament dispensation having a temporary design, superseded by those of the New, when that design had been accomplished. The tabernacle and temple with their furniture, distinguished, like the 'chariot,' for their durable materials (including cedar), and the gold and silver of which they were composed; the veil of 'blue, purple, scarlet, and fine-twined linen' (that of the temple also adorned with embroidered cherubims), and the covering of the tabernacle of 'rams' skins dyed red,' overlaid with badgers' skins,—all figures of 'good things to come,' of which divine 'love' is the beginning, middle, and end (John iii. 16; Eph. v. 25, &c.).

No journeying to heaven for sinful men but in this chariot of love. Every portion of the blood-bought Bride of Christ brought into it through the knowledge and belief of the truth which it is designed to proclaim. A place in it offered by Christ to every sinner through the voice of the Bride whom it conveys (Rev. xxii. 17). The chariot passes by wherever the Gospel is preached, with an invitation even to the chief of sinners to accept of Jesus as their Saviour, Bridegroom, and King, and to enter it as a portion of His Bride. Unspeakable blessing to have a place in this Bridal chariot of the King of Kings. Terrible consequences of slighting the invitation (Heb. ii. 3).

The Royal Marriage.

Verse 11.

Citizens, *calling to the Women of Jerusalem.*

Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion,
And behold King Solomon;
With the crown wherewith his mother crowned him;
In the day of his espousals,
And in the day of the gladness of his heart.

The bridal procession now supposed to have entered the city, and to be either passing along the street, or to have arrived at the palace. The language sufficiently indicative that the royal marriage is now taking place in the poem, or about to do so. That marriage the point to which the previous events in the Song were preparatory steps. This verse, therefore, to be regarded as the central part of the poem. The king exhibited as already wearing the nuptial crown or chaplet, such a crown being worn in the East by the bridegroom as well as the bride, and usually placed on his head by his mother, if still surviving. The royal marriage naturally an object of special interest and attraction to the citizens, more particularly the king himself, its central figure.

The espousals of Israel's king with Shulamite a picture of the marriage of the Lord Jesus Christ with His Church at His second coming, when His Bride shall have 'made herself ready' (Rev. xix. 7). On that infinitely solemn and glorious day of the King's espousals, those who 'have fallen asleep,' but whose already perfected spirits shall come with Him to be reunited to their raised and glorified bodies, as well as those who shall be 'alive and remain to His coming,' being 'in a moment' changed and glorified without tasting of death, shall be 'caught up to meet the Lord in the air,' and to go with Him into the new Jerusalem to be presented to His Father and their Father, and to sit down together at the 'Marriage Supper of the Lamb,' and so to be 'for ever with the Lord' (1 Thess. iv. 14—17; 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52; Rev. xix. 7—9). The most prominent figure in the whole transcendently glorious scene, and the object attracting the eyes of men and angels, will naturally be Christ Himself as

The Royal Bridegroom;

here exhibited under the name and title of one of his most distinguished Old Testament types, King Solomon. Observe—

1. *Christ will appear at His second coming in the character of* KING. His title exhibited 'on His vesture, and on His thigh:' KING OF KINGS, and LORD OF LORDS. Never till then fully manifested in this character. The dignity claimed for Himself at Pilate's bar, but denied Him by His own subjects, or those who ought to have been such. His title virtually and practically denied by the world, and, to a great extent, by the professing Church, who say by their spirit and their lives: 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' The scene indicated in the text faintly foreshadowed by the Saviour's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. (Matt. xxi. 9; Luke xix. 38).

2. *Christ will especially appear as* KING SOLOMON. 'Solomon' derived from a word denoting 'peace.' His reign a reign of peace. The sword, always drawn in the reign of David his father, slept in its scabbard during that of Solomon. Jesus the Prince of Peace. Himself our peace. The 'Man' who should be 'the peace.' Has made peace by His blood. His birth celebrated by angels as inaugurating 'peace on earth.' That peace, however, never fully enjoyed on and by the earth, till He ascends the Throne 'at His appearing and His Kingdom.' Till then His Kingly character represented by David the 'man of war,' rather than by Solomon the Peaceful. His followers now called to fight as 'good soldiers of Jesus Christ.' Only then called to sit down and feast as his Bride at the 'Marriage Supper of the Lamb.'

3. *Christ will appear at His second coming in the character of a* ROYAL BRIDEGROOM. Solomon's crown 'wherewith his mother crowned him,' neither a political, nor a martial, but a nuptial crown. This crown put on his head not by priest or potentate, but by 'his mother.' Worn by him not on a state occasion, or on a day of triumph, but on the day of his espousals. The period indicated, that of the public espousals of Christ with His saved Church on the day of His glorious appearing. That period, however, preceded by two secret and mystical espousals which may be blended with those public ones; namely, His crucifixion, when His human mother, in the person of the soldiers, placed on His head the crown of thorns; and the sinner's conversion to Christ and open avowal of Him as his Lord and King. His believing people presented unto Him at His coming as a chaste virgin, having been previously espoused to Him as their husband (2 Cor. xi. 2). The time to which Paul looked forward as the goal of his hopes in connection with his labours in the Gospel (1 Thess. ii. 19). Every saved soul a flower in Christ's bridal chaplet; or rather a part of the Bride herself. Saved souls the crown of those who had been the instruments in their salvation; much more to Christ Himself, who redeemed and saved them. The crown, therefore, placed on His head by His spiritual mother, the Church in which He Himself was born; in joyful compensation for the crown of thorns with which His natural mother, or humanity, crowned Him in the day of His deep humiliation and sorrow. Every act of faith and love by believing souls, a step towards Christ's coronation. Before conversion, we put the crown on our own heads; after conversion, we put it on Christ's.

4. *Christ's second appearing the 'day of the gladness of His heart.'* The day of the Bridegroom's greatest joy that on which He receives His Bride (Is. lxii. 5). That day looked forward to by Christ in the midst of His sufferings as 'the joy that was set before Him,' for which He willingly 'endured the cross, despising the shame' (Heb. xii. 3). That day the climax of His joy. His loving heart rejoiced even in the day of His humiliation, when He found the lost sheep and laid it on His shoulders. Much more in the day of His exaltation, when He has all the sheep safely and for ever with Himself at home (Luke xv. 56). The day when He presents to His Father all that had been given to Him to save, saying, 'Here am I, and the children whom thou hast given me'

(Heb. ii. 13). That day the joyous harvest after the seed-time of sorrow and anguish He endured on earth. The compensating fruit of the pain He suffered, the tears He shed, and the blood He gave for the redemption of His Bride. To the joy of that day every single conversion now contributes; and accordingly, every faithful and loving effort put forth by His people for such conversion. The seed sown now in tears, then reaped in joy.

5. *The day of Christ's appearing and espousals a day of intense interest to the Church and to the world.* The daughters of Zion called to 'go forth and behold King Solomon,' with his nuptial crown' in the day 'of his espousals.' When Christ comes in the clouds as the Royal Bridegroom of His Church, 'every eye shall see Him' (Rev. i. 7). The joy of all joys to behold Him on that day as our own Bridegroom (Is. xxv. 9). The sorrow of all sorrows to see Him as the Bridegroom whom we continued to despise and reject (Rev. vi. 14—17).

The day of Christ's public espousals and of 'the gladness of His heart' fast hastening on. Eighteen centuries ago the Bridegroom left the promise with His expectant Bride: 'Surely I come quickly' (Rev. xxii. 20). His parting word not yet fulfilled. The Bride not yet ready. The number of His elect not yet accomplished. The Gospel of the kingdom not yet preached for a witness to all nations. Yet the time may be near. The Gospel never so widely preached as now. In a short time all nations will have heard it. The last vessel of mercy probably ere long gathered in, when the Bride shall have made 'herself ready.' A very short time and the cry may be heard, arousing a sleeping world and a slumbering Church: 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him.'

PART THIRD.

The Marriage Feast.

CHAPTER IV. 1—16, TO V. 1.

SCENE FIRST. **Place:** *Bridal Apartment in Solomon's Palace.* **Speakers:** *The King and Shulamite.*

THE KING,

Expressing his Admiration of and Delight in his Bride.

CHAP. IV. 1—7.

Behold, thou art fair, my love;
Behold, thou art fair.
Thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks.
Thy hair is as a flock of goats,
That appear from Mount Gilead.

Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn;
Which come up from the washing;
Whereof every one beareth twins;
And none is barren among them.

Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet;
And thy speech is comely.
Thy temples are like a piece of pomegranate,
Within thy locks (or, 'behind thy veil').

Thy neck is like the tower of David,
Builded for an armoury;
Whereon there hang a thousand bucklers,
All shields of mighty men.

Thy two breasts are like two young roes
That are twins,
Which feed among the lilies.

Until the day break,
And the shadows flee away,
I will get me to the mountain of myrrh,
And to the hill of frankincense.

Thou art all fair, my love;
There is no spot in thee.

Shulamite not now merely a betrothed, but a married wife. Hence in this chapter, for the first time, called by Solomon, 'My spouse.' Her veil removed in the bridal apartment, Solomon surveys her beauty, and contemplates her person with intense delight. *Spiritually*, the Church, or individual believer, still regarded as on earth, but in an advanced stage of experience as compared with that of the preceding chapters. *Historically*, the New Testament Church, or the Church after Pentecost, indicated; the crucifixion and death of Jesus, followed by His resurrection and ascension, being regarded as the nuptials. In reference to individual believers, the present part of the Allegory may be viewed as descriptive of the time when they have made the public and solemn profession of their acceptance of and self-dedication to Jesus, by sitting down at His table, and receiving that seal of the Covenant and pledge of His love.

The text, Solomon's previous commendation of the Bride now repeated with considerable enlargement and particularity. Formerly, only her dove-like eyes commended and admired. Now all her features, as well as the upper parts of her person—her hair, neck, and breasts. Observe—

1. *A growth of grace in believers.* The path of the just as the shining light. Believers changed from glory to glory. Beautiful in Christ's eyes here; much more so hereafter. Heaven the place of just men made perfect.

2. *Periods of special advancement in the history of the Church and of individual believers.* A great advance in holiness and grace in the Church of the New Testament after the day of Pentecost, as compared with that of the Old Testament. A similar advance to be experienced in the Millenial Church as compared with the Church in its present state. The light of the moon made to be as the light of the sun; and the light of the sun as the light of seven days (Is. xxx. 26). A great increase of grace often visible in the case of a believer after a solemn and public dedication of himself to the Lord, and a sealing of the Covenant at the Lord's Table. Believers frequently sensible of a considerable advance in grace, and of an elevation of their spiritual life to a higher level. Such elevations often preceded by painful trials, deep soul-exercises, and renewed conviction of sin. Much higher attainments in grace to be gained than are ordinarily arrived at. Such attainments to be earnestly desired and sought after. Provision made for them. 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' 'Be ye filled with the Spirit' (Ps. lxxxi. 10; Eph. v. 18).

3. *The highest delight of Jesus in the spiritual beauty and perfection of His Church and people.* 'Forget thine own people and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty' (Ps. xlv. 10). 'The Lord in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save; He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with singing' (Zeph. iii. 17). Christ's joy fulfilled in the spiritual prosperity and perfection of His people. The description of the Bride's beauty in the text a climax, indicative of the joy of the Bridegroom—his affection kindling as he contemplates the object of his love. Commences with: 'Thou art fair;' and ends with: 'Thou art all fair; there is no spot in thee.'

4. *The believer's love, as expressed in the 'eyes,' her main attraction in the view of Christ.* The Bride's dove-like eyes the first feature described, and the only one previously mentioned. The eyes the expression of the soul, and especially of the tender emotions. Doves distinguished for their affection, especially to their mates. Hence, 'doves' eyes' particularly expressive of the affection of a loving Bride. The believer's eyes such; as being meekly and lovingly directed to Christ as His Bridegroom.

5. *The beauty and excellence of the believer in Christ's eyes made up of a variety of particulars.* Seven here mentioned, as perhaps indicative of the believer's perfection. Not necessary exactly to fix the spiritual reference of each, though desirable to find the corresponding grace in the believer's character. The various particulars that constitute the spiritual beauty and excellence of the believer scattered up and down in the Scriptures. Sometimes brought together in a cluster, as in the text. So in Gal. v. 22; 2 Pet. i. 5; Phil. iv. 8; Col. iii. 12. These particulars all seen combined in their perfection in the person of Christ Himself. The believer's duty and interest to see that none of these features in the spiritual character are wanting or defective in him. Symmetry, proportion, and completeness necessary to the perfection of the Christian character.

6. *The comparisons in the description not all equally obvious, though equally suitable.* Their aptness more obvious and natural to an Oriental than a European reader. That aptness seen more in the general impression than in the particular resemblance. Beautiful and striking things in the person of a beloved one compared in the East by an ardent admirer, or by a writer of poetry, to other beautiful and striking things, where only a general or distinct resemblance might exist. The Bride's breasts thus compared to 'two twin fawns' feeding among 'lilies' or in a flowery mead; the prominent idea

being probably that of love and conjugal enjoyment (Prov. v. 19). Her fair neck, with its jewelled and golden ornaments, suggestive, in the eyes of Solomon, of the lofty marble 'tower' erected by his father David, with the glittering 'shields' of warriors suspended on its walls as indicative of the nation's strength; thus conveying the idea of moral firmness, dignity, and purity in the Bride. Her black tresses—a prominent feature in Oriental female beauty—suggestive, to those accustomed to the pastoral scenes of Judæa, of 'a flock of goats,' with their long, dark, glossy hair, seen at a distance browsing on the mountain side; suggesting to *us*, however, the true ornament, not only of the female but of the Christian character in general—that 'of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price' (1 Pet. iii. 3). The Bride's 'lips' compared to a 'thread of scarlet,' as, while beautiful in themselves, suggesting a still greater charm,—the sweetness and comeliness of her 'speech,' as expressive of a pure, affectionate, and intelligent soul, and rendering her a meet companion for an enlightened husband; a prominent feature in a spiritual believer being that his 'speech' is 'with grace, seasoned with salt;' able to 'minister grace to the hearers;' and that 'no corrupt communication' is allowed to proceed out of his mouth, but 'that which is good to the use of edifying' (Col. iv. 6; Eph. iv. 29) The whole presence of the Bride suggests to the admiring husband a 'mountain of myrrh' and a 'hill of frankincense,' where all is fragrant, sweet, and delightful: what the pure-minded and loving wife is to her husband, and what the Church and the believer's soul is, or ought to be, to Christ.

7. *Christ's great enjoyment in the grace and fellowship of His believing people.* The Bridegroom, after surveying and admiring Shulamite's unveiled charms, with the delightful consciousness that she is now all his own, resolves, for her comfort as well as his own, duly to enjoy her society and love. 'Till the dawn and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh,' &c. The 'mountain of myrrh' to Jesus is not so much the 'quiring Seraphim' and the angels of light, as 'his people, whom he has redeemed with his most precious blood,' whether these be triumphant in heaven or still militant on earth. 'This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it' (Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14). His place of enjoyment is among the 'golden candlesticks,' or Churches of the saints (Rev. ii. 1).

8. *Christ's presence in and with His Church promised during the whole of her stay in this world.* That period, one of *night*—of darkness, danger, and discomfort (Rom. xiii. 12). His second coming to His Church, the dawning of a bright and never-ending day. Till then His presence promised both to believers individually and to their assemblies convened in His name. (John xiv. 23; Matt xviii. 20). His promise to His servants and people in connection with the great commission: 'Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world' (Matt. xxviii. 20). The words of the text those of Jesus at the Supper Table in the upper room at Jerusalem: 'I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you' (John xiv. 18), Specimens of the fulfiment of the promise given immediately after His resurrection (John xx. 16—28; Luke xxiv. 15—33; Acts i. 4).

9. *The Church, both in its individual members and in its assemblies and ordinances, made a 'mountain of myrrh and hill of frankincense' by the person of Jesus Himself.* No fragrance or sweetness apart from Himself. 'Thy name is as ointment poured forth.' All His garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. Ordinances themselves insipid without Christ. Believers 'stale and unprofitable,' but as they have Christ dwelling in them by His Spirit. Christ the 'bundle of myrrh' that sweetens both the believer's spirit and the Church's ordinances. The care and concern of Churches and believers to be constantly, by the presence of Jesus and His Spirit, a mountain of myrrh and hill of frankincense.

10. *If the Church on earth is made by the presence of Jesus a 'mountain of myrrh and a hill of frankincense, what shall heaven be?'*

The Bridegroom's Invitation.

(Verse 8.)

Come with me from Lebanon,
My spouse, with me from Lebanon;
Look from the top of Amana,
From the top of Shenir and Hermon,
From the lions' dens,
From the mountains of leopards.

The King intimates to his beloved that he has a better place of residence prepared for her than that which had hitherto been her home; that it was his desire that she should soon accompany him to it; and that in the meantime she should withdraw her affections from her former abode. Her previous home is represented as being in Mount Lebanon with its snow-capped heights, either really, or in a locality thus poetically named. Lebanon, in its higher regions, with its adjacent peaks of Amana, Shenir or

Sirion, and Hermon, mentioned as a place both of danger and discomfort, notwithstanding the pleasant spots found in its valleys and lower slopes. The text the language of tenderest affection. For the first time Shulamite called by the King 'my spouse.' The marriage viewed as now having taken place. The Bridegroom's earnest desire to have his Bride always with him. His care that she should be with him in a place of comfort and security. Wishes her to leave those cold bleak mountains, the haunts of the lion and the panther; but to do so with the aid and protection of his arm and the solace of his company.

The text may be viewed as corresponding with the words of Jesus at the Last Supper: 'In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John xiv. 2, 3). Observe, in reference to the Bridegroom's

Call from Lebanon,

I. *The* CALL *itself.* 'Come with me,' &c. To be viewed as a Call—

1. *To leave the world in heart and affection.* The world, in its present state of apostasy and rebellion, here represented by Lebanon and its snowy peaks. This the believer's native home. The place where he is born and brought up. Christ's Bride originally *of* the world as well as *in* it. 'Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past' (Eph. ii. 3; Tit. iii. 3). This world, in its present state, however, not to be the home of Christ's Bride. A place prepared for her in His Father's house. The world is to believers—(1) A place of *discomfort.* Like Lebanon with its bleak and barren rocks, and its cold snowy heights. 'In the world ye shall have tribulation.' (2) A place of *danger.* Lebanon a place of lions' dens. 'Your adversary, the devil, goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.' 'My soul is among lions—the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows' (1 Pet. v. 8; Ps. lvii. 4). (3) Yet a place *not without attractions.* Lebanon adorned with some of the loveliest spots in nature. The world, even in its fallen state, possessed of many attractions which might entangle the affections of Christ's Bride—'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life' (1 John ii. 16). The call in the text, not to leave the world as to bodily presence, but in *heart and affection.* This, perhaps, indicated in the parallel clause: 'Look from the top of Amana,' &c. Withdraw your thoughts and affections from those rugged heights to your better home. 'Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest.' 'Seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.' 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world' (Mic. ii. 10; Col. iii. 1, 2; 1 John ii. 15). The Bride to forget her own people and her father's house (Ps. xlv. 11). Believers to look not at the things which are seen and temporal; but at those which are unseen and eternal (2 Cor. iv. 18). This world not be viewed as our home, but as an inn where we tarry for a night. Believers, while here, only strangers and pilgrims, journeying to their own country. Their home in the better land, the heavenly Canaan, the new Jerusalem, the city that hath foundations. Their language to be that of the pilgrim in reference to the cities which he passed on his way to Jerusalem—"very beautiful; but this is not Jerusalem."

2. To leave it in *life and practice.* Believers not to be 'conformed to this world, but transformed,' by the renewing of their mind. Though *in* the world, not to be *of* it. 'Be ye not, therefore, like unto them.' Believers to be as strangers in this world in *life and practice,* as well as in heart and affection. Christian and Faithful represented as passing through Vanity Fair without buying any of its wares, or even so much as pricing them. Gazed at in the Fair as 'outlandish men.' Their only answer: 'We buy the truth.' Paul's testimony, in the name of believers—'Our conversation (life or citizenship) is in heaven.' Believers to act and comport themselves in this world as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, to which they belong (Phil. iii. 20).

3. To leave it as to its *friendship and society.* Too great a difference between believers and the men of the world to admit of cordial friendship and society. 'We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness' (or 'in the Wicked One') (1 John v. 19). 'How can two walk together except they be agreed?' 'Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath light with darkness? Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate' (2 Cor. vi. 14—17). 'The friendship of this world is enmity with God: whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God' (James iv. 4). The believer's proper language: 'I am a companion of all them that fear thee.' 'My goodness extendeth not unto thee; but unto the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.' 'I have not sat with vain persons: I have hated the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit with the

wicked.' 'Depart from me, ye evil-doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God' (Ps. xvi. 2; xxvi. 4, 5; cxix. 115). Men known by the company they keep. Peter and John, 'being let go, went unto their own company.' 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another' (Mal. iii. 16; Acts iv. 23).

The believer's life a daily coming 'from Lebanon.' 'If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.' Believers, being redeemed from this present evil world, to take heed lest they be 'again entangled in the yoke of bondage.' Need the daily prayer: 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.' Their standing caution: 'Remember Lot's wife.'

4. To leave the world *at death*. The comfort of believers that they have to leave this world, not merely in heart and affection, in life and practice, and in respect to its friendship and society, but also, in due time, in actual bodily presence. A better home provided for them. Their happiness in being where their Husband is. The death-call to them only their Bridegroom's voice: 'Arise, my Love, my Fair One, and come away.' To the believer, the passage to the tomb no Dolorous Way. Sense sings a dirge at the grave; faith, a Hallelujah. A believer enters his sepulchre through pearly gates. Not deadly nightshade, but roses and lilies line the path to it. It is the last step in the journey home, or rather the actual arrival at it. The funeral bell may toll its slow and solemn strokes on earth, but cheerful peals are rung in heaven. The pardoned soul's desire now granted: 'I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. To me to die is gain.' 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.' 'Now, Lord, lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.'

5. To leave the world *at the Lord's Second Coming*. Till then, a part of the Bride always still in Lebanon. The bodies also of those whose spirits are with Christ in Paradise still in the earth. The final call to come from Lebanon given at last. 'Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust,' uttered by the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God. The Lord Himself descends from heaven with a shout that echoes through the mansions of the dead. They that sleep in Jesus, joining the living and now glorified saints, ascend to meet Him in the air. The Church's blessed hope at last accomplished. The Bride's last recorded prayer on earth now answered. The Bridegroom's last loving promise now fulfilled—'Surely I come quickly.'

II. *The character of the* JOURNEY. 'Come with me from Lebanon.' The journey from Lebanon and its snow-capped heights neither easy nor safe. Its rugged paths, steep precipices, and ferocious animals, sufficient to render the descent both painful and perilous to the bride. A picture of the believer's passage from this world, the place of his nativity, to the home prepared for him in the Father's house. Manifold temptations often mingling heaviness with our joy. Much tribulation the way to the kingdom. Persecution promised to all who will live godly in Christ Jesus. The world's hatred in proportion to their faithfulness to their Master and to their character as the Bride of Christ. Their adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, going about and seeking whom he may devour. Principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, leagued to obstruct or annoy their passage. A carnal mind and evil heart of unbelief still lingering within themselves. The flesh lusting against the spirit, and its lusts warring in their members. The flesh weak to what is good, even when the spirit is willing. Need for constant watchfulness and prayer. The foot easily slipping, and the consequence a bruising fall. Broken bones not unfrequent in the descent from Lebanon. Noah, David, and Peter, humbling examples. No easy matter to walk safely down the rugged steeps. Difficult so to keep ourselves that that Wicked One touch us not. Not easy to break with a world lying in wickedness, and to pass through it unscathed. Faithful made a victim in Vanity Fair, and Christian well nigh the same. Not easy to pass through pollution without being soiled; to travel through an enemy's country without getting into trouble; or to walk among gins and pits without making a fall. Constant need for the prayer: 'Hold thou me up, that my footsteps slip not. Preserve me, O God, for in Thee do I put my trust.' Death, too, in the journey from Lebanon. A passage from which poor human nature instinctively recoils. To us an unknown and naturally a formidable road. Beset also with spiritual adversaries. Not unfrequently accompanied with acute and prolonged suffering. The taking down of the tabernacle not always a smooth or easy process. The presence of earthly friends often of little avail. The roughest and dreariest part of the passage, perhaps, to be travelled alone. Sometimes the pathway tracked with blood. Lies at times through torture, the scaffold, and the stake. The path at first too rugged even for a Cranmer. The prayer in the Burial Service not entirely needless: 'Suffer us not, in our last hour, for any pains of death to fall from thee.'

III. *The* COMFORT *and* AID *in the journey.* Indicated in the two little words: 'With me.' These precious words repeated, to call special attention to what they imply, to confirm their truth, and to indicate their importance. An argument to induce compliance with the Call. The Bridegroom's society preferable to the Bride beyond that of all others. Who would remain among lions and panthers when they can have the fellowship of the king? No great loss to leave the cold bleak heights of Lebanon to be with the heavenly Bridegroom. A twofold blessing implied in the words—(1) The everlasting presence of Christ after the journey is over; (2) His company and support all the way through. The descent from Lebanon made safe and comfortable to the Bride by the Bridegroom's presence. Precious to believers to know that they are not called to leave the world, whether in heart and affection, or in life and practice, or in bodily presence, alone and unaided. The presence and aid of the Friend 'that sticketh closer than a brother,' promised in every trying, difficult, and dangerous passage of life, as well as in the last dark valley. 'Fear not, for I am with thee.' 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the floods, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest in the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.' Hence the triumphant language of faith: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise up against me, in this will I be confident.' 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me' (Ps. xxiii. 4; xxvii. 1, 2).

"The soul that on Jesus hath lean'd for repose,
He will not, he cannot desert to its foes.
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
He'll never, no *never*, NO NEVER, forsake."

The presence of Jesus with the believer in his descent 'from Lebanon' on the way to his future home—(1) For *comfort.* The company of a friend a solace in a difficult and dangerous journey. (2) For *aid and protection.* The Bridegroom's arm employed to support and defend, as well as His voice to solace and cheer. 'Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning on her Beloved?' The grace of Jesus sufficient for the most difficult duties, the strongest temptations, and the most painful trials. His strength made perfect in our weakness. Hence faith's language: 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' (3) For *example.* The Bridegroom has descended from Lebanon before us. Points us to His steps as He came down its difficult and rugged steeps. 'He hath left us an example that we should walk in His steps.' 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame.' (1 Pet. ii. 21; Heb. xii. 2).

The promise indicated in the words 'with me,' applicable to the believer's death, as well as his life. His presence with them also in that final, solemn, and untried journey. Joseph sent his servants and waggons to convey his father to Egypt. Jesus not only sends His angelic servants to fetch His Bride and escort her through the darksome valley, but comes Himself. Not only makes a passage for them through the dark swelling waters of death, but, like the Ark in Jordan, is with them Himself in the passage. Seen by Stephen on the eve of martyrdom, not sitting as usual, but standing at the right hand of God, as if risen up to be with His faithful servant in the last great conflict, and to give him a loving welcome when it was over. The footsteps of Jesus seen also in that last dark passage. The Bridegroom Himself trod the pathway to the tomb. Encountered death in its most formidable aspect. Passed through the valley in excruciating pain, amid jeers of men and assaults from Satan, and in a bath of blood. Travelled the last hours of His life in loneliness, darkness, and desertion of soul. Has lain in the tomb a lifeless corpse before us. The grave made by His presence there a perfumed bed to all His followers.

Important questions: Have I Jesus with me for my comfort and aid in going through this world? Shall I have His presence in death? Have I heard and obeyed His call to come with Him *now*? Am I taking up my cross daily, and following Him? Have I given up the world or am I still making it my home? We come *to* Christ as sinners, before we come *with* Him as saints. Have I done this? Reader, if not, lose no time; but do it *now.*

THE KING HAPPY IN HIS BRIDE.

Verses 9—15.

Thou hast ravished my heart,
My sister, my spouse:
Thou hast ravished my heart,
With one of thine eyes,
With one chain of thy neck.

How fair is thy love,
My sister, my spouse!
How much better is thy love than wine;
And the smell of thine ointments than all spices!

Thy lips, O my spouse,
Drop as the honeycomb;
Honey and milk are under thy tongue;
And the smell of thy garments
Is like the smell of Lebanon.

A garden enclosed
Is my sister, my spouse;
A spring shut up
A fountain sealed.

Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates,
With pleasant fruits;
Camphire with spikenard,
Spikenard and saffron,
Calamus and cinnamon,
With all trees of frankincense;
Myrrh and aloes,
With all the chief spices.

A fountain of gardens,
A well of living waters,
And streams of Lebanon.

The climax of the King's admiration of, and delight in, his Bride. Realization of the words of the forty-fifth Psalm, the Song of Loves: 'So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty.' The happy Bridegroom had already described the charms of his Bride; he now declares, in the language of impassioned affection, the effect which these produced upon him: 'Thou hast ravished my heart.' Literally 'Thou hast hearted me.' A new word coined to show the intensity of Christ's love to and delight in His believing people. Christ's heart in the possession of the loving believer. His love to His people that of the most ardent lover; yet calm, deep, and holy His Church His peculiar treasure. (Ex. xiv. 5). The King, in addressing his Bride, combines terms expressive of the nearest and tenderest relations, each supplementary to the other. 'My sister, my spouse;' or, 'my sister spouse.' Names of nearest kindred employed in the East as terms of affection. These combined terms immediately afterwards repeated by the King in order to indicate the reality of the relationship, the intensity of his affection, and his delight in employing the title. The believer not to forget that he belongs to Christ, both as his Brother and his Bridegroom. Is at once both the sister and the spouse of Jesus. His *sister*, as having the same Father and the same nature; Christ assuming the believer's human nature and imparting to him His Divine one. His *spouse*, as now united in a marriage-bond with Himself, having been betrothed by Him in an everlasting covenant (Hos. ii. 19; 2 Cor. xi. 2; Rom. vii. 4). In the believer the ardour of a spouse's love combined with the purity of a sister's. Typified in Eve, at once the sister and the spouse of Adam. The ardour of Christ's love to His people grounded—(1) On the relation in which they stand to Him as the Bride given Him by the Father. (2) On the fact that, as His Bride, He has brought them from the bondage of sin, Satan, and the curse of a broken law, by the price of His own agony and blood. (3) On the holy beauty which, as His blood-bought Bride, He imparts to them by the renewing and transforming grace of His Holy Spirit, more especially the beauty of their faith and love. What costs most, usually most beloved. The Shepherd rejoices most over the sheep which He had lost, but with much toil and trouble had found. A saved soul an addition to the happiness of heaven. The Saviour's joy bound up in the sinner whom He saves. The *grounds* of the King's admiration of and delight in his Bride, rapturously indicated by himself:—

1. Her *beauty*. More especially that of her 'eyes' and 'neck,' the one directed to himself in a tender affection, the other bowed in humility and self-surrender: 'Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.' One, as indicating the perfection of beauty and redundancy of charms beheld in the Bride. One believing penitent look of the sinner sufficient to secure the Saviour's love. (Zech. xii. 12). Christ overcome by the look of the Syro-Phœnician woman and of the dying thief. The Bride's eyes and neck contrasted with the wanton and adulterous eyes, and the stiff and stubborn neck of an impenitent world.

2. Her *love*. 'How fair is thy love,' &c. Literally 'loves,' as in chap. i., verse 4. Probably expressions and manifestations of love. The term and the comparison following formerly applied by the Bride to the King's love; now returned to her with tender emphasis. The love of the loved one the sweetest enjoyment of the lover. The love of the saved soul the joy and reward of the Saviour. The faith and love of the forgiven woman in the Pharisee's house, infinitely sweeter and more refreshing to Him than the wine on Simon's table, and even the precious ointment with which she anointed His feet. His wine-cup on the cross the love of a pardoned sinner.

3. Her *savoury spirit.* 'The smell of thine ointments is better than all spices.' The fragrance of her spirit properly her own ointments. This sweeter to the king than all the 'powders of the merchant' with which she might perfume her person. 'The smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon,' celebrated for its odoriferous trees (Hos. xiv. 5, 7). Her garments properly her spirit and deportment. 'Be ye clothed with humility.' 'Put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies.' 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.' Garments, in the East, often richly perfumed, especially on marriage and other festive occasions. So those of the King Himself (Ps. xlv. 8). The 'ointments' both of the King and of the Bride the graces of the Spirit, imparted first to Christ, without measure, then to His members, 'according to the measure of the gift of Christ.' The precious ointment poured on the head of Aaron runs down upon the beard, 'even to the skirts of his garments' (Ps. cxxxiii. 2). The 'smell' of the Bride's garments, the sweetness of the actings and exercises of those graces. The part of believers, as having Christ and His Spirit in them, to carry about with them a spiritual fragrance, sweet to Christ and profitable to men.

4. Her *speech and conversation.* 'Thy lips, O my spouse drop as the honeycomb,' &c. An enlarged repetition of the commendation already given,—'Sweet is thy voice,' 'thy speech is comely.' Shulamite's speech the index of her soul. 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.' A wife's sweet, savoury, enlightened conversation the delight of an intelligent husband. Especial attention paid by Christ to the speech of His people. 'Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard' (Mal. iii. 17). Believers to be of circumcised lips as well as heart. Their lips touched with the live coal from off the altar (Isa. vi. 4). The poison of asps is changed for the honey and milk of the Holy Spirit. Honey and milk under the tongue, when the milk of God's Word is in the heart. Christ's Word dwelling richly in us shows itself in sweet and wholesome conversation. The sweetest honey gathered from the flowers of Holy Scripture. To have honey dropping from our lips, we must have the honeycomb in our heart. The honey first under the tongue, then on it. Meditation on the Word the best means for speech that shall minister pleasure to Christ and 'grace' to the hearers.'

5. On *her general excellence and beneficial influence.* This represented under four comparisons—(1.) *An Enclosed Garden.* 'A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse.' A garden a place for pleasure. An Oriental garden a scene of special beauty. A garden enclosed indicative of—(i.) Its preciousness; (ii.) The care taken of it; (iii.) Its preservation for the owner's exclusive enjoyment. The Church and each individual believer Christ's enclosed pleasure-garden. 'I will walk in them;' not merely *with* them. His Church the object of His special care. 'I, the Lord, will keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day' (Isa. xxvii. 3). Believers set apart for His own enjoyment. 'The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself' (Ps. iv. 3). The Church, as a garden, distinguished from the world. The world, apart from Christ's Church, a moral desert. That Church enclosed for its safety and defence. Safe, though surrounded by wild beasts and raging enemies. God Himself a wall of fire round about her (Zech. ii. 5). Believers 'kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' (2.) *A locked-up Spring and a sealed Fountain.* 'A spring shut up, a fountain sealed.' Such locked and sealed fountains frequently found in the East. The lock and seal indicate value, care, and exclusive use. The fountains thus kept from being dried up by the heat, defiled by animals, or employed by strangers. Springs and fountains especially valuable in the East. The special delight of Orientals during the heat of summer. Gardens and courts usually provided with them. The Church of living and loving souls a spring of delight to Christ, as He is to His people. 'I will sup with him and he with me.' The believer's heart shut up to all but Christ. The Bride exclusively for her husband (Prov. v. 15—18). Believers 'holiness to the Lord.' Their life hid with Christ in God. Sealed by the Holy Ghost to the day of redemption. The motto of the seal: 'The Lord knoweth them that are His.' Under the Old dispensation the fountain sealed in one nation; under the New, spread over all the world. (3.) *An Orchard of fruit trees and spices.* 'Thy plants are an orchard,' &c., 'with pleasant fruits,' or 'fruit of excellence,' or 'precious things' (Deut. xxxiii. 13—16). 'Camphor,' cypress, or henna (chap. i. 14). 'Calamus,' or sweet cane (Jer. vi. 20; Exod. xxx. 23). 'Frankincense,' employed in the composition of the holy anointing oil (Exod. xxx. 34). 'Myrrh,' distilling from an Arabian shrub, and hardening into a gum. 'Aloes,' a costly and sweet-smelling wood; connected with myrrh also in Psalm xlv. 9; Proverbs vii. 17; John xix. 39. Solomon, familiar with orchards, fruit trees, and spices (Eccles. ii. 5), saw in these only a picture of the excellencies found in his beloved Shulamite. Such Christ's estimate of His Church. His Church to Him the antitype of Eden (Gen. ii. 8, 9). Believers 'trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.' Represented as olives and vines, palms and cedars, firs and myrtles. The Church collectively an orchard containing a variety of trees, and

each believer one containing a rich variety of Christian graces (Gal. v. 22). All the fruits of the Spirit found in believers in a greater or less degree of development. Their duty to cultivate each, and to seek its maturity. To 'abound in every good word and work' (Col. i. 9). To be 'filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.' To abound in every grace (2 Cor. viii. 7). The object for which Christ gave himself for His Church (Eph. v. 27; Tit. ii. 14. The Church and each believer to produce not only 'fruits,' but 'spices.' A believer's life, spirit and conversation, to be not only pure, holy, and upright, but sweet and savoury. Believers to exhibit not merely what is sterling and excellent, but also what is lovely and attractive. (4.) *A Fountain sending forth refreshing and fertilizing streams.* 'A fountain of gardens' — by which gardens are watered, hence affording an abundant supply (Jer. xxxi. 12; Isa. lviii. 11). 'A well of living waters'—always full and always flowing. 'Streams from Lebanon'—such as those in the Zebdani Valley, or the 'Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus,' fed by the snows of Lebanon (Jer. xviii. 14). The Bride in one sense a 'sealed fountain;' in another a fountain sending forth its streams for the general benefit (Prov. v. 15, 16). The virtuous woman not only the confidence and joy of her husband, but kind to all, and the benefactor of the poor (Prov. xxxi. 11, 12, 20, 26). The Church, while the delight of Christ, a blessing to others. Christ, the fountain of living waters, makes the believer a well of living water by being in him. The Holy Spirit in believers as a well of living water (John iv. 14). Renders them a means of life, strength, and comfort to others. Believers not only recipients of the living water, but channels for the communication of it to their fellow men and fellow Christians (John vii 38). Made receivers in order to be givers. Receive the manifestation of the Spirit for the benefit of others (1 Cor. xi. 7). Believers to be refreshed by one another (Philemon 7, 20). To comfort and edify one another. One believer like Harlan Page, the means of life and blessing to a whole neighbourhood. The Church the means of spiritual verdure and fruitfulness to the world at large. Through Christian missions, the desert made to rejoice and blossom as the rose. Believers watered themselves while watering others, and in order that they may do so (Prov. ix. 25). 'Living water' indicative of (i.) the *perpetuity;* (ii.) the *excellence;* (iii.) the *wholesomeness;* (iv.) the *exhaustless nature*, of Christ's grace. The voice or breath of prayer the first bubbling up of the 'well of living water' (Acts ix. 11). Grace in a believer makes him as

Streams from Lebanon.

The streams visible; their source hidden from human view. What is good, holy, and spiritually beneficial, communicated by Christ through His Spirit to the believer, and from the believer to the world. Grace in the Church exhibited as 'streams.' Indicative of—(i.) the *fulness;* (ii.) the *freeness;* (iii.) the *liveliness;* (iv.) the *beauty;* (v.) the *abundance;* (vi.) the *refreshing nature*—of Christ's grace. The 'streams from Lebanon' in the Zebdani Valley, among the most beautiful things in nature, and making all beautiful in their neighbourhood. The most beautiful as well as the most beneficial things in Creation employed by Christ to set forth the excellence of His Church, and the grace which produces it.

Important questions suggested by the passage: Does Christ take delight in me and in what He sees in me? Is it my aim to afford joy to Him as my Saviour and Bridegroom? Are my feelings towards Him those of a bride towards her husband? Am I seeking to cultivate all the various fruits of the Spirit? And not only the fruits, but the 'spices?' Am I endeavouring, through the Spirit of Christ in me, to practice not only what is pure, and just, and honest, but also what is lovely, and of good report? Am I careful not only as to *what* I do, but the *manner and spirit* in doing it? Is my life useful to others, as 'streams from Lebanon,' beautifying and refreshing those I come in contact with? 'Strike out of my heart, O God, a well of living water!'—*Dr. Chalmers.*

Bridegroom's Prayer for his Garden.

Verse 16.

Awake, O north wind,
And come, thou south!
Blow upon my garden,
That the spices thereof may flow out.

The Bride still viewed by the Bridegroom as his garden. That garden one of spices as well as fruits. Her spirit and conversation sweet and refreshing to her husband. His desire that that sweetness may be fully exhibited in all their intercourse with each other. The fragrance of aromatic plants not always evolved alike. Some circumstances more favourable for its evolution than others. Its evolution chiefly dependent

on the state of the atmosphere, and the kind and degree of wind flowing. Hence the Bridegroom's wish poetically expressed: 'Awake, O north wind,' &c. The north wind, perhaps, thus called to depart and give place to the south wind, as more favourable for the emission of the fragrance. Possibly, however, the call equally to both, as both alike needful to that emission.

Not enough that gracious dispositions, or the fruits of the Spirit be implanted in a believer's soul. These not to be latent and dormant, but to be drawn forth in lively exercise, so that Christ may be glorified and find pleasure. That exercise dependent, in some degree, on external circumstances, on the situation in which the believer may be placed, and even on his physical health. More especially, however, on the degree of divine influence which he may at any time enjoy. The breath of the spiritual wind as necessary for the lively exercise of the gracious affections, as that of the natural one for the exhalation of the fragrance of a bed of spices. The spiritual wind the Holy Spirit. The Spirit frequently in Scripture compared to a wind (John iii. 8; Acts ii. 2; Ezekiel xxxvii. 9). That Spirit the 'spirit of love, power, and a sound mind.' Hence essential to a believer's spiritual prosperity, and to the gracious and beneficial influence he may exercise on the world. Equally important to personal happiness, domestic peace, and conjugal comfort. Especially necessary to Christ's enjoyment of His Church, both collectively and individually. Hence, the text a call on the part of Christ for the gracious influence of the Spirit upon the Church and the believer's soul. These again viewed as

The Garden of Christ.

The text presents to our notice—

I. *The* GARDEN *itself.* The Church and the believing soul is—

1. *A Garden.* It is so, as being—(1) *Reclaimed from the world.* Originally the children of wrath, even as others. Separated by distinguishing grace. Chosen out of the world. Called out of darkness into marvellous light. 'We are of God, but the whole world lieth in wickedness' (1 John v. 19). (2) *Safely enclosed.* Hedged round by divine protection. 'Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' 'A vineyard of red wine; I the Lord do keep it.' 'The Lord is thy keeper.' 'I will be a wall of fire round about her.' 'Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.' 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' (3) *Carefully cultivated* [illegible] God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—engaged in its cultivation. 'My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth fruit he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' 'I will water it every moment.' For its cultivation also, a number of human labourers, for various departments of work, employed in the garden. 'He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.' (4.) *Planted with choice plants* Every believer a tree of righteousness. The fruits of the Spirit produced in the garden: 'Love, joy, peace, long-suffering,' &c. The loveliest specimens of humanity found in Christ's garden. Naturally, because sanctified and renewed humanity. 'The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree; they shall grow as the cedar in Lebanon. They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age. They shall be fat and flourishing' (Ps. xcii. 12, &c). (5.) *Designed for the pleasure and enjoyment of the Master and his friends.* The garden in the text, with its beds of spices and flowers a pleasure-garden. So the Church and a believer's soul. 'I will walk in them!' 'The Lord taketh pleasure in His people.' The name given by Himself to the Church, 'Hephzi bah'—'my delight is in her.' 'This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.' The Lord in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save; He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with singing (Zeph. iii. 17). (6.) *Kept clean and orderly.* Weeds not suffered to grow or continue in it. 'Lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisy, and envies (or grudges), and all evil speakings.' 'Purge out the old leaven.' 'Put off the old man, with his deeds, which are corrupt.' 'Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour.' 'Ye also put off all these—anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, out of your mouth.' 'Looking diligently lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you.' 'Keep yourselves in the love of God, hating the garment spotted by the flesh.' Believers to keep themselves unspotted from the world. In the Church all things to be done 'decently and in order' (1 Cor. xiv. 40).

2. *Christ's Garden.* As being — (1) *Chosen and given to Him by the Father* (Eph. i. 3; John x. 30). (2) *Chosen by Himself for His own.* 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.' (3) *Purchased by His blood.* 'He loved the Church, and gave himself for it.' 'The Church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.' The Church, like the rest of the world, originally

under sentence of death through sin. That sentence removed by the substitution of Christ in their stead. (4) *Reclaimed by the Spirit.* The Church not only redeemed by price, but separated by power. The Spirit given to Christ for that purpose. The instrumentality employed, the truth of the Gospel in the lips and lives of believers. (5) *Employed for His own use and pleasure.* 'This people have I formed for myself' Believers the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.

II. *The* CALL. Observe—

1. The *Called.* The Call addressed to

The Holy Spirit as a Wind.

So John iii. 8; Acts ii. 2; Ezek. xxxvii. 9. The Spirit so represented—(1) From His *invisibility* (John iii. 8). (2) From His *power.* 'A mighty rushing wind' (Acts ii. 2). Nothing able to resist the wind in Nature, or the Spirit in grace. (3) From the *universality of His operations.* The wind blows everywhere, over the whole earth. The Holy Spirit's operations confined to no land place, class, age, condition, or circumstances. (4) From the *mysterious character of His movements and operations.* The general nature of the wind as air in motion, and the general principle of its movements, tolerably understood. But its local changes and varieties among the most difficult things in Nature to account for. Blown in every possible variety of direction. Sometimes changes from one direction to another entirely opposite. Sometimes from opposite directions at once. Sometimes in one form and degree, sometimes in another. Two winds here mentioned: the North and the South. The North wind cold to those in the Northern hemisphere, as from the region of ice about the Pole. In the East, a healthful and refreshing wind (Prov. xxv. iii; Job xxvii. 21, 22). The South wind warm, as from the regions about the Equator, always greatly heated by the direct rays of the sun (Job xxxvii. 17). The effects of these opposite winds consequently of an opposite character. The tendency of the one to bind up and restrain; that of the other to loosen and disengage, the odours of aromatic plants. So the operations of the Holy Spirit various in their character and effects. Sometimes as a piercing North wind, convincing, reproving, awakening, disturbing, shaking. Sometimes as a soft and balmy South wind, melting, softening, soothing, comforting. Under His convincing operation, the multitude at Pentecost cried: Men and brethren, what shall we do? Under His comforting agency, they gladly received the word of reconciliation, and experienced peace (Acts ii. 37, 47). The dispensation of the Law, and its application to the individual conscience, one operation of the Holy Spirit: the dispensation of the Gospel, and its application to the heart, another. Both North and South wind necessary in the economy of Nature; and both the convincing and comforting operations of the Spirit needful for the Church and the individual soul. The first rather preparatory to the second. The warm and quieting South wind more suited for the evolution of the spices of the garden. So the fruits of the Spirit brought forth in the Church and in the believer rather under the Gospel than under the Law; under the still small voice of evangelical consolations, than under the whirlwind of legal terrors. Yet the latter often necessary to the former.

2. The *Caller.* Christ Himself. His constant concern and care about His Church's spiritual prosperity. None so interested in its fruitfulness and beauty. Never forgetful of His Church's interests. While on earth His constant prayer to His Father on its behalf. Still walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks, as the High Priest of His Church, attending to their proper condition. Intercedes for His people at God's right hand. Prays also on earth in the person of His members. The Holy Spirit given in answer to such prayer. The disciples waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father; but waited in prayer and supplication, for ten days. Their prayer the Call of Christ in them: 'Awake, O North wind,' &c. The Spirit only given in His fulness after Jesus had completed His work of atonement (Luke xii. 49, 50; John vii. 39; xvi. 7). The Spirit committed into His hands after His ascension into heaven. His added title then — He that hath the Seven Spirits of God (Rev. iii. 1). As if to point to the words of the Song and to intimate their meaning, the Spirit's descent on the Day of Pentecost like that of 'a mighty rushing wind' (Acts ii. 2). Still continues the part of Christ to call for the Spirit to blow upon His garden, the Church, in answer to the fervent, believing prayers of his people. 'Ask of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain: so shall the Lord make bright clouds (or lightnings), and give them showers of rain.' 'If men who are evil know how to give good gifts unto their children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? (Zech. x. 1; Luke xi. 13). The Church's duty not only to pray for the Spirit, but to seek the removal of every hindrance to His effusion. 'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, and prove me herewith; if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it' (Mal iii. 10)

3. The *Call* itself. 'Awake—come—blow.' The Holy Spirit, though given, not always and alike in actual operation. Never entirely absent from the Church. Believers

His permanent abode. May be present, however, in different degrees and in different ways. In the Old Testament dispensation, as a spirit of bondage; in the New, as a spirit of liberty. Through defective faith and careless walking, may still be a spirit of bondage. Hence different states of the Church and of individual believers. The Spirit given in the greatest measure yet known on and after Pentecost. Often greatly withheld from the Church's unfaithfulness, unwatchfulness, and unprayerfulness. The candlestick in danger of being removed from its place. Churches and individual believers aroused at times to a sense of their need of the Spirit, and to earnest prayer for His gracious and powerful operation. This usually the first indication of the Spirit's visitation. Earnest and persevering prayer for the Spirit's effusion the token that that effusion will be bestowed. Such prayer either the call of the Bridegroom in the text or its happy precursor. Fervent prayer for spiritual blessing the voice of His Spirit in the believer's heart (Rom. viii. 26, 27).

III. *The* OBJECT *of the Call.* 'That the spices thereof may flow out.' Not enough that the spice-plants are there. The odours may be shut up in their cells and no fragrance be emitted. The pores to be opened and the odorous particles to be exhaled. Grace given to believers to be exercised and made sensible. Not enough that a Church exists, and that grace is in it. The Church to be in a spiritually lively state, and the grace of believers to be in lively exercise. Only thus may Christ enjoy the fellowship and works of the Churches. See his epistles to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. i. and ii.). The Church at Laodicea in a condition only to be spued out of His mouth. Neither a church nor a believer to be satisfied with a lifeless and lukewarm state. Lukewarmness—a state *between* hot and cold—Christ's greatest abhorrence. Yet too often the state of Churches and professors when enjoying rest and outward prosperity. The state most agreeable to the carnal mind. The duty and privilege of believers not only to have life, but to have it' more abundantly.' A divine injunction: 'Be ye filled with the Spirit.' Churches and believers in a spiritual and lively condition such as Christ delights to dwell in, and such as He can employ for the conversion of others. The Spirit promised to the disciples, that they might be His witnesses to the end of the earth. David's prayer and resolution: 'Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit; then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee' (Ps. li. 12, 13). A lively and spiritually prosperous state of the Church and of believers the result of the Spirit's gracious operation, in obedience to the Call in the text. As the Holy Spirit blows, the Church's odour flows. Hence His gracious and abundant effusion to be earnestly and perseveringly sought. 'For this will I be inquired by the house of Israel to do it for them' (Ezek. xxxvi. 37). Believers to stir themselves up 'to take hold of God and His gracious power. Their's to awaken the arm of the Lord, to put on strength as in the days of old' (Is. li. 9) His will that they should not keep silence and should give Him no rest till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. 'Concerning the work of my hands, command ye me 'Ye have not, because ye ask not' (Is. xlv 11; lxii. 6, 7; James iv. 2).

THE BRIDE'S DESIRE.

Verse 16.

Let my Beloved come into his garden And eat his pleasant fruits.

The Bride reciprocates the Bridegroom's love. 'My love,' answered with 'My Beloved.' Christ's love to us the ground and occasion of ours to Him. The Bride's desire one with her Husband's. He admires and commends her as his garden. She invites him to the enjoyment of it. *His* desire that its spices should flow forth; *hers* that he should come and eat its pleasant fruits. Believers made such for Christ's enjoyment: their desire that He should have it. The Bride calls herself: '*His* garden.' Believers no longer their own, but Christ's. 'Ye are bought with a price.' Christ claims the Church as *His* garden: believers gladly respond to the claim. 'One shall say: I am the Lord's.' 'O Lord, I am Thy servant; thou hast loosed my bonds' (Is. xliv. 5; Ps. cxvi. 16). Christ's *presence* in and with His Church the believer's greatest desire. 'Let my beloved come into his garden.' His presence in His Church and with believers, not always alike. Times in the Lord's earthly ministry when He hid Himself Such times still. 'Thou art a God that hidest Thyself.' 'He hideth His face from the house of Jacob.' Times when the Bride has to cry to her Husband: 'Why hidest thou Thyself.' Israel exhorted to keep their camp holy, lest the Lord who walked in the midst of it should see any unclean thing and turn away from them (Deut. xxiii. 14). Christ's visit to and continuance with believers connected with their love and obedience. 'He that hath My commandments and keepeth them,' &c. (John xiv. 21).

The Bride's desire that nothing may hinder his presence and stay with her. The Church and the believer who desires Christ's presence, to be careful to put away whatever is offensive to Him. His words to the lukewarm, self-satisfied, and self-righteous, yet poor, wretched, miserable, and blind, and naked Church at Laodicea: 'Beloved, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me' (Rev. iii. 20). Christ's condescension and love to His Church, that He finds His sweetest entertainment in it. Finds and eats 'his pleasant fruits.' 'With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.' Fellowship with loving and lively believers His greatest joy. The desire of such believers that He may find in them that joy. The believer, notwithstanding his own corruption, conscious that through grace there are with him pleasant fruits for Christ to eat. No part of faith to deny the Spirit's work. 'Know ye not that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?' 'The care of believers that Christ may have pleasant fruits in them, both in abundance and in good condition, for His own enjoyment. No pleasant fruits in the Church or a believer, but what are *His*, and the production of His own Spirit. '*His* pleasant fruits.' The fruits in the garden Christ's; the weeds and briars our own. The productions of grace in the soul, 'pleasant fruits;' those of unsanctified nature, sour crabs. Christ's 'pleasant fruits' found only in His Church. Elsewhere, only 'wild grapes.' Pleasant fruit found only on the branches of the True Vine. The smallest service of believers rendered in faith and love, reckoned and enjoyed by Christ as 'His pleasant fruits.' Their believing prayers sweet incense to Him. Their thanksgivings and praises a well-pleasing sacrifice. Their gracious words recorded in His Book of remembrance. Their tears of godly sorrow put into His bottle. Observe—

1. Believers to be more concerned about Christ's enjoyment than their own. Their desire to be rather that Christ may eat His pleasant fruits than that they themselves should.

2. Believers to consider that all that is theirs is His, and that what He accepts at their hands is best bestowed. Their honour and happiness that He can accept of anything they have, and can employ it for His own glory and pleasure.

3. Fruitfulness and love on the part of the Church most likely to secure Christ's presence in it. To gain the Bridegroom's presence the Bride must have her 'pleasant fruits.'

4. The believer's best time when Christ comes in to him, and eats with him his pleasant fruits. 'I will sup with him and he with Me.'

The Bridegroom's Response.

Chapter V. Verse 1.

Scene Second. Place: *Banquet Hall in the Palace.* **Speaker:** *The King.*

TO THE BRIDE.

I am come into my garden,
My sister, my spouse;
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;
I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey;
I have drunk my wine with my milk.

TO THE GUESTS.

Eat, O Friends;
Drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved.

1. *The Bridegroom's address to the Bride.* 'I am come,' &c. The King, like Ahasuerus, accepts the Queen's invitation to the banquet of wine. Expresses his readiness and delight to do so. The believer's desire for Christ's presence no sooner expressed than fulfilled. 'Before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear' (Isa. lxv. 24). Christ's visits not long delayed when His people are earnest and ready to receive them. 'When the hour was come, He sat down with the twelve.' The Bride herself the banquet; yet a material feast the accompaniment and outward expression of it. The marriage celebrated with a marriage feast. The feast now prepared, and the guests assembled. The bridegroom conducts his bride to the table. Picture of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, after the reception and presentation of the Bride. Also, historically, of the Last Supper, soon after the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and immediately preceding the crucifixion. That Supper to be continued in the

Church till Christ the Bridegroom come again. Believers, especially while seated at the Lord's Table, and, according to His dying command, showing forth His death by eating and drinking the symbols of His body and blood in remembrance of Him—His garden and His banquet. The Bride, as well as the table and all its provisions, His own. These provisions only mentioned by the Bride, but enlarged and dwelt on by the rejoicing Bridegroom. A higher value set by Christ on the fruits of His Spirit and His own mediatorial work, than by the believer himself. Those fruits of great variety. Each of them a special delight to the Saviour. The myrrh of a believer's repentance as acceptable to Christ as the spice of His love. The humblest gifts of love as acceptable as the most costly. The honeycomb as well as the more valuable honey within it. The common milk as well as the richer and more costly wine. The widow's two mites more precious in His eyes than the larger offerings of the rich. Enough for Him when He can say: 'She hath done what she could.' The turtle dove or young pigeons of the poor as acceptable as the lamb or bullock of the rich, when laid in love upon the altar. 'It is accepted according to what a man hath, and not what he hath not.' The cheerfulness of the giver makes the acceptableness of the gift. 'Where Christ gets a welcome, He never complains of the fare.'—*Durham.* When Christ was risen from the dead, 'His disciples gave Him a broiled fish and a piece of a honeycomb, and He ate before them.' (Luke xxiv. 42, 43). Probably designed by the Holy Spirit as another connecting link between the Song and the Gospels.

II. *The Bridegroom's address to the guests.* 'Eat, O Friends,' &c. The king invites his friends to partake of his joy. Recals the Saviour's language to His disciples at the Supper table: 'Take, eat: Drink ye all of it.' 'I have not called you servants, but friends: Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I have commanded you.' The Marriage Supper of the Lamb partaken of by His friends, who are also the Bride herself. Observe—

1. A high honour and privilege to be called Christ's friends; though a higher still to be called His Bride.

2. Where Christ is, He wishes her friends to be with Him. Those who invited Christ must also invite His friends. At Cana, both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the marriage (John ii. 1).

3. Christ's desire that all who are His should share His joy. His reward to His faithful servants: 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

4. When Christ comes into His Church and people, He brings His provisions with Him; and while He sups with them, He gives them to sup with Him (Rev. iii. 20).

5. The provisions of Christ's house and table, of great variety, richness, and plenty (Ps. xxxvi. 8; lxv. 4). 'I am come that my sheep might have life, and have it more abundantly.' 'I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness; I only satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul' (Jer. xxxi. 14, 25). Christ's provisions both nourishing and refreshing—both milk and wine. Correspond with the blessings of salvation offered in the Gospel (Isa. lv. 1). At His rich banquet, no danger either of surfeit or excess.

6. Christ gives not only wholesome and heaped cheer, but a hearty welcome.—'Drink, yea drink abundantly.' 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.' 'Be ye filled with the Spirit' (Ps. lxxxi. 10; Eph. v. 18).

7. All the provisions of Christ's table the purchase of His own suffering and death. Perhaps indicated in the first article mentioned by the king: 'I have gathered my myrrh.' Myrrh bitter to the taste. This gathered by the King Himself. Vinegar and gall, the symbol of His own bitter sufferings, handed to Him on the cross, before the wine and milk, emblems of the blessings of salvation, could be handed to us. The bread given at the Supper Table the symbol of His broken Body; the wine that of His shed Blood. 'The bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world (John vi. 51).

8. A threefold Feast provided by Christ for His friends, as the Bridegroom of the Church—(1) In their personal and private experience as they journey through the wilderness. The 'feast of fat things' made by Christ in His holy mountain, the Church, for the benefit of Zion's travellers. The 'bread eaten in secret' (Rev. iii. 20). (2) In the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, as first instituted in the upper room at Jerusalem, and celebrated in the Church from time to time until He come again. The happiest experience of the believer often connected with that sacred Feast. (3) The Marriage Supper of the Lamb after He has come to take the Bride to Himself, and she has made herself ready; the number of the elect being then accomplished, and the kingdom having come. The Lord's Supper an image and foretaste of that heavenly banquet.

PART FOURTH.

The Coolness and its Consequences.

CHAPTER V. VERSE 2.—CHAPTER VI. VERSE 9

SCENE FIRST. Place: *The Palace at Jerusalem.* **Speakers:** *Shulamite and the Ladies of the Court, or the Daughters of Jerusalem.*

SHULAMITE RELATING A NIGHT'S EXPERIENCE.

Verse 2.

I sleep (*or*, was sleeping),
But my heart waketh (*or*, was awake).

The second great division of the Song now reached: the period after the marriage. The exposition more difficult. In the present section the Bride relates to the ladies of the Court her experience during the night. Probably a dream. The narrative, however, possibly given by the Bride in a song sung at the marriage, with the view of exhibiting both the Bridegroom's excellences, her entire love to him, and, at the same time, her own unworthiness of him. She has retired to rest, perhaps at the close of one of the seven days during which the nuptial feast continued (Judges xiv. 15—17). Her ardent love to her husband, and the delight she enjoyed in his fellowship, give rise apparently to a dream, exhibiting, as often happens, the opposite of the reality. After she has retired to rest, her Beloved knocks at her door, desiring admittance. She strangely and unkindly hesitates, and makes silly and selfish excuses for not admitting him. After pleading in vain for admittance, he withdraws, but not until he has inserted his hand into the hole of the door as if, according to oriental custom, for the purpose of opening it. Seeing his hand, she relents, and rises to open; but too late. He has withdrawn and is gone. Full of distress, she searches for him in the city, but in vain. At last, as if recalling to mind his ordinary haunt, in the eagerness of her desire to find him, she hastens to the spot.

The narrative, whether given as that of a dream or otherwise, designed, like the rest of the Song, to exhibit the experience of believers individually, as well as that of the Church as a whole. What was, perhaps, a dream to Shulamite, too often the reality in the case of the believer and the Church. The experience, in either case, as in hers, the effect of *sleep*. The narrative illustrative of—

Spiritual Sleep and its Effects.

Verified—(1) In the state of the *Jewish Church* at the time of the Saviour's advent. 'He came to His own, but His own received Him not.' Jerusalem knew not the day of her visitation. (2) In the case of *the disciples*, after the Last Supper, in the garden of Gethsemane. Heavy with sleep and unable to watch but one hour with their Master agonizing under the dews of the night; and afterwards abandoning, denying, or betraying Him. (3) In the experience and history of the *Christian Church* after the Apostolic age. That state of the Church in general represented by the Church at Laodicea. So described as readily to recall this portion of the Song (Rev. iii. 19, 20). (4) In the occasional experience of a *child of God*. A believer's enjoyment of the Saviour's fellowship not unfrequently followed by a state of carnal security and sleep. The danger here indicated for our warning. 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.' The warning never more needed than at a time of special spiritual enjoyment. Like the Master Himself, believers often taken from the Jordan of enjoyment to the Wilderness of temptation.

The Bride asleep, though her heart was awake. In a believer's worst state, spiritual life and love still in existence. His sleep that of carnal security, not that of spiritual death. His slumber that of the *couch*, not that of the *grave*; one from which an awakening is not difficult, and must sooner or later come. The *flesh* in a believer only asleep, while the *spirit* in him is still awake. Believers to distinguish between the two, and to understand their own spiritual experience.

The Bridegroom's Appeal.

Verse 2.

The voice of my beloved that knocketh,
Saying, open to me, my sister, my love,
My dove, my undefiled;
For my head is filled with dew,
And my locks with the drops of the night.

Natural for a husband to repair to his home after the fatigues of the day; and as natural for him to expect a cordial welcome. Christ's love indicated in the fact that He, too, comes from time to time, and knocks for admission into the heart (Rev. iii. 20). His desire to receive entertainment from His people, and to enjoy fellowship with them. 'If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' The love and fellowship of His people the reward of His toil and travail for their salvation. The Son of God left His Father's bosom to find a home in the sinner's heart. His head, for our sakes, 'filled with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night.' His nights often spent under the open sky in prayer on our behalf, while others rested in their bed. His last night on earth a sleepless one in some part of the high priest's palace, with His hands still bound with cords as a criminal. In the text we have—

Christ's Call to His Sleeping Church.

I. *The party* Called. The Bride. Indicated in her own language: 'The voice of my beloved.' Also in that of the Bridegroom: 'My sister, my love,' &c. Strange that Christ's Bride should ever be slow to admit Him. As true as it is strange. An effectual call addressed to those who constitute the Church whom He loved, and for whom He gave Himself. These found by Him originally in the sleep of death. Too apt to fall again into carnal slumber, though not into spiritual death. Only living souls able to distinguish Christ's voice as the voice of their Beloved. Only a believer able to say: 'I sleep, but my heart waketh.'

II. *The* State *implied*. One of spiritual sleep. Our natural state. One into which the believer may relapse, though never so deeply as before. Such

Spiritual Sleep

a state—(1) Of security and ease. (2) Of indifference and unconcern. (3) Of indolence and sloth. (4) Of carnal indulgence. (5) Of spiritual inactivity. (6) Of insensibility to one's best interests. (7) Of self-deception—sleep usually accompanied with *dreaming*. Such a state the result of—(1) The body of sin and death still adhering to us. (2) The world's temptations—its cares, pleasures, pursuits, society. (3) Satan's endeavours—his old trade (Gen. iii. 14; 2 Tim. ii. 26, *margin*). (4) Sense of safety experienced after believing. (5) Neglect of watching unto prayer, and other appointed means. (6) A state of comfort and enjoyment. (7) An avoidance of the cross.

III. *The* Knocking. 'The voice of my beloved that knocketh' (or 'knocking'). Christ's Bride not allowed to remain in a state of spiritual sleep. Christ has to knock both before conversion and after it. Knocks both in outward warnings and inward calls. Knocks—(1) By His *Word*. Every appeal in the Bible a knock at the sleeper's heart. The language of Christ in the Scripture as well as of all His faithful servants: 'Awake thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light.' (2) By His *Providence*. A thorn in the flesh sent both to awaken and to keep awake. Christ's knocks often heard on a bed of sickness, and in the chamber of death. His language often in trouble: 'As many as I love I rebuke and chasten: be ye zealous, therefore, and repent (Rev. iii. 19). (3) *By His Spirit*. The Spirit Christ's Agent in dealing with men's souls. Knocks from without *before* conversion; from within, *after* it.

IV. *The* Call *to open*. The voice added to the knock. Christ in earnest to be admitted. 'Open unto me.' Will not force an entrance, but produce a welcome one. His people willing in the day of His power (Ps. cx. 3). To 'open' implies—(1) To *invite His entrance*. Like Laban to Eliezer, 'Come in thou blessed of the Lord.' (2) To *give Him a hearty welcome* as the inmate of our heart; glad to entertain Him and enjoy His fellowship. (3) To *remove the hindrances to His entrance*—any sinful habit, indulgence, or disposition. 'The dearest idol I have known,' &c. (4) To *receive Him as an entire Saviour*, and to surrender ourselves to Him as our Prophet, Priest, and King.

V. *The* Plea *for admission*. A threefold plea employed by the Bridegroom—

1. *His relation to the sleeper*. 'My sister.' Open to *me*. The last words emphatic. To '*Me*,' thy husband and Saviour. To *Me*, whom thou hast sworn to love, honour, and obey. The *person* who knocks, the strongest of all arguments for admission. The greatest

of all shames to keep such a friend and Saviour at the door. When Christ knocks for admission into the heart, it is either as already a husband, or seeking to become one.

2 *His love to the sleeper.* Indicated in the terms He employs: 'My love, my dove, my undefiled.' Christ's love to sinners in general, and to His Church in particular, as seen especially in giving Himself for them, a powerful reason for admitting Him to their heart. That love further seen in passing over their defilement and unworthiness, and in regarding only the work of His Spirit in their hearts. The multiplication of the tenderest terms in addressing the sleeper, indicative—(1) Of the Bridegroom's great and unchanging love. (2) Of His earnest desire for admission. (3) Of the difficulty of awakening the sleeper.

3. *What He has endured on the sleeper's behalf.* 'My head is filled with dew,' &c. In visiting the Bride, and in seeking admission as the Bridegroom of His Church, during His earthly ministry, this often literally true. 'The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.' Often spent the whole night in prayer for His people under the open sky. 'Every man went unto his own house; but Jeses went into the Mount of Olives' (John vii. 53; viii. 1.) In redeeming His Church and saving a lost world, 'His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.' His last night on earth one of accumulated sufferings. His mental agony in the Garden towards midnight indicated by 'great sweat-ike drops of blood falling down to the ground.' His betrayal and arrest at midnight, followed by long weary hours in the nigh priest's palace, while He stood bound as a criminal before the tribunal, first of Annas and then of Caiaphas, and remained the rest of the night in the hands of ruffian menials in the guard-room—spit on, buffeted, struck with rods, and made the subject of their fiendish sport—till led away at daybreak to the general council-room to undergo a third examination. His sacred head filled with the wrath-drops of that awful night, and of a still more awful day that followed it. Such a night and day of anguish, suffering, and blood it cost the Son of God to obtain admission to the sinner's heart, in order to fill Him with the joys of salvation. What more powerful plea can be used for admission?

The Unkind Response.

Verse 3

Shulamite.

I have put off my coat;
How shall I put it on?
I have washed my feet;
How shall I defile them?

Sad answer from the beloved spouse of a king. More like the answer in a dream than in reality. The language only of one oppressed with physical or moral sleep. The excuse for not opening at once as silly as it was selfish. No great difficulty in resuming a garment just laid aside. No great sacrifice in soiling the feet by walking across the floor. The effects of spiritual sleep—(1) To see difficulties in the way of duty where none exist, and greatly to exaggerate those that do. The language only of the sluggard, 'There is a lion in the street' (Prov. xx. 4; xxvi. 3. Haggai i. 2—4). (2) To be unwilling to deny ourselves, or make sacrifices for Christ; and to think those we are called to make much greater than they really are. (3) To be more careful about personal comfort and carnal ease, than about the pleasures of Christ and the interests of His kingdom. (4) To be oblivious of our own best interests. (5) To forget our character and condition as believers, and to act in a way entirely inconsistent with it. Too common for believers to act in a way unlike themselves. In a low state of religion this usually the case. The wise virgins too often slumbering with the foolish ones. An early Apostolic rebuke to a Christian Church: 'Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?' Possible even for believers to act at times more according to the flesh than the Spirit. (6) To act rather as *in a dream* than as one awake. The life and conduct of men in general. Possessed of deathless souls, yet caring only, or most, for a short-lived body. Born for eternity, yet concerned only, or most, for the things of time. Possessing interests inconceivably high, glorious, and important, and yet expending their time and energy on trifles. Sentenced as sinners to eternal damnation, but with the gracious offer of a free pardon; and yet under no concern to secure it. Under the power of a loathsome disease that must, unless removed, exclude them from heaven, and shut them up in hell; and yet slighting the freely proffered services of the only Physician who is able to cure them. The endless glories and felicities of heaven, with peace and comfort in the way to it, procured at an amazing cost by the Son of God, and freely

offered, along with Himself, for the immediate acceptance even of the chief of sinners; and yet slighted and refused for the paltry enjoyments of time and 'the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season.' The testimony of Scripture true: 'Madness is in their hearts while they live, and afterwards they go down to the dead' (Eccles ix. 3).

The language of the Spouse an example of the

Excuses,

made for not giving immediate attention to the Saviour's call, and the concerns of the soul. Such excuses usually either — (1) *Want of time and leisure;* (2) *The difficulty and sacrifice* involved—as, loss of worldly favour, friendship, or enjoyment; the scoff and ridicule of neighbours and associates; the effort required to keep up a religious profession and attendance upon religious ordinances, &c.; or, (3) The *intention* to give more heed to the things of eternity at a *future and more favourable opportunity.* Such excuses foolish and unreasonable; as—

1. Nothing of an earthly nature can for a moment be compared, in point of importance, with the concerns of eternity. 'What shall a man be profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' Well-being for eternity obviously, with an immortal soul, the one thing needful.

2. No difficulty involved in accepting Christ and His salvation which His grace will not enable us to overcome; and no sacrifice which will not be infinitely more than compensated. His own testimony true: 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' 'When I sent you without purse or scrip, lacked ye anything? And they said: Nothing, Lord.'

3. The present moment only ours. A more favourable opportunity may never come. Felix never found his 'more convenient season.' With our salvation it may be now or never. Delay only hardens the heart, and makes salvation more difficult.

4. Persons of all classes, and in all circumstances and conditions, are continually by their example shewing the practicability and blessedness of receiving Christ and experiencing His salvation.

Main truths suggested by the passage in reference to believers:—

1. The carnal mind remaining in a believer always the same, and as much disinclined to spiritual communion as it was in his unconverted state.

2. *That* in a believer, through the remains of a carnal nature, which continually subjects him to condemnation, with the increased guilt arising from greater knowledge and past experience of the divine mercy.

3. Only the unchangeableness of Christ's love, and of the Covenant of grace which has been made with him in Christ, along with the existence of a new and spiritual nature imparted to him at conversion, preserves the believer from final apostacy, and from sinking back into his former state of carnality and unbelief.

Love's Conquest.

Verse 4.

My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door,
And my bowels were moved for him.

Shulamite continues her narrative. The Bridegroom, unwilling to take a refusal, employs further means for obtaining admission. Inserts his hand, through the hole made for opening the door in the inside. The sight of his hand gains the desired compliance.

Observe—

1. Christ unwilling to take a refusal on the part of redeemed sinners, and especially of His believing though backslidden people. His patience unwearied, because His love is unchangeable (Hos. xi. 7—9).

2. A work of Omnipotence needed as well for restoring saints as for converting sinners. The *hand* to be employed as well as the *voice;* the power of the *Spirit* as well as the call of His *Word.* Preachers successful because the Lord works with them, giving testimony to the Word of His grace, and confirming that Word with signs following. 'The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord' (Acts xi. 21; xiv. 3). The Lord's hand also often put forth in *Providence,* when His voice is not hearkened to in His *Word.* The secret springs of the soul in the Saviour's hand. 'He that openeth, and no man shutteth: and shutteth and no man openeth.

3. Christ turns the heart, but employs suitable means and rational motives in doing so. The Bridegroom shewed his hand; but left the Bride to draw back the bolt herself 'Christ puts no force upon our *nature,* but upon our *ill* nature.'—*Henry.* His people willing in the day of His power. God, in a work of grace, does His part, and leaves us to do ours. Believers to work out their salvation, because God works in them 'both to will and to do.' The apostles 'so spake that many believed.' The Lord opened Lydia's heart, that she attended to the things spoken by Paul. The believing connected with the

speaking as its result. The Lord opens the heart, but Lydia attends to what is spoken (Acts xiv. 24; xvi. 14). Christ's voice raised Lazarus from the dead, but the people were to remove the stone from the grave, and then to 'loose him from his grave-clothes and let him go' (John xi. 39—44).

4. Faithful preachers not to despond. If one means or message fails, another may be made successful. 'In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper.' 'If the axe be blunt, he putteth forth more strength.' Sometimes a providence successful where the preacher has failed.

5. Christ acquainted with the best means of reaching the heart. Sometimes the least likely means the most successful. The Lord's mere look broke Peter's heart. The mere sight of the Bridegroom's hand did more to melt the heart of the Bride than either his repeated knock or his imploring call. A preacher's loving earnestness often the means of moving the careless more than the words he utters.

6. Inward motions necessary to outward action. 'My bowels were moved for him' (or, 'in me'). The Spirit, in conversion or restoration, acts upon the conscience and feelings. The three thousand at Pentecost pricked in their hearts, and then cried: 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' The moving of Peter's bowels the turning point of his second conversion.

7. The exhibition of Christ and His love the most effectual way of leading to true repentance. 'My bowels were moved for, or on account of him.' 'They shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn because of Him' (Zech. xii. 10). Preaching Christ, and Him crucified, the readiest as well as most Scriptural way of moving mens' hearts.

8. Great and palpable effects on the soul under the Holy Spirit's operation. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof.'

9. Believers able to mark and record the operations of the Spirit on their heart, and their inward experience in relation to Christ.

The Bride's Repentance.

Verse 5.

I rose to open to my beloved;
And my hands dropped with myrrh,
And my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh,
On the handles of the lock.

Shulamite not only *felt*, but acted. 'I rose to open to my beloved.' In matters of religion, feeling valuable as it leads to action. Such actions to be prompt. 'Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.' 'I made haste and delayed not.' 'Repentance, when real, puts the most careless on their feet.'—*Durham.* So the Prodigal Son: 'I will arise and go to my father. And he arose and went.' So the penitent Corinthians (2. Cor. vii. 10, 11).

A circumstance connected with Shulamite's action related. 'My hands dropped with myrrh, &c., upon the handles of the lock.' Did she bring it with her? or did she find it there? Probably the language only a poetic way of expressing the feelings of sweet and joyful ardour with which she hastened to admit her beloved, and anticipated his embrace. Thoughts of him were now to her in the place of the best sweet-smelling myrrh. Observe from the passage—

1. No time to be lost in opening to Christ. The Bride delayed and suffered for it. Now shakes off her sloth and rises at once. Christ's call to Zaccheus, that to each soul: 'Make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house.' The conduct of Zaccheus to be ours: 'He made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully' (Luke xix. 5, 6).

2. A special sweetness accompanying true penitence and a hearty reception of Christ. Shulamite's hands dropped with sweetest myrrh while attempting to open to her beloved. Every act of faith and self-denying obedience for Christ accompanied with a sweetness and satisfaction unable to be found in the pleasures of the world or in the indulgence of the flesh. True penitence a sweet sorrow. Myrrh bitter to the taste, but sweet to the smell. Christ brings sweetness with Him. His name: 'Ointment poured forth.'

Grace acts in order to move the soul to action. When the Bridegroom puts forth his hand at the hole of the door, the Bride must put forth her hand to open to him. Believers to work out their salvation, because God works in them both 'to will and to do of His own good pleasure.'

4. Nothing sweeter to Christ than a soul penitently and earnestly rising to open to Him. Fingers perfumed that open to Christ.

5. Grace supplied as the soul rises to perform its duty and obey Christ's call. Only when Shulamite rose to open, her hands dropped with sweet-smelling myrrh. Duty earnestly and obediently attempted at the Saviour's call found both easy and pleasant. The handles of the lock found perfumed with myrrh. Delay accumulates rust, and renders duty more difficult.

THE DISAPPOINTMENT.

Verse 6.

I opened to my beloved;
But my beloved had withdrawn himself,
And was gone.
My soul failed when he spake.

I sought him;
But I could not find him.
I called him;
But he gave me no answer

Shulamite's delay has disappointment for its fruit. Christ's call not to be trifled with. Duty may be attempted too late to be immediately successful. God forgives His sinning people, though He may see fit to chasten them. Indulgence of the flesh, even for a short time, may bear bitter fruit. David's short sin produced long sorrow. Falls, though not fatal, may bring broken bones. Samson, awaking from his sleep in Delilah's lap, 'wist not that his strength was departed from him' Observe, in regard to

Divine Withdrawings,

1. These withdrawings *real*. A fact stated. 'My beloved had withdrawn himself.' Such a thing as God hiding His face.

2. These withdrawings such as to be observed and known. The Bride bears testimony to the fact. She knew it. Believers to know their case.

3. Well for believers and others to know when the Lord withdraws Himself. The saddest case for a man when God withdraws from him, and he either does not know it or pays no attention to it. Israel's misery that 'grey hairs were here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not' (Hos. vii. 9). An ill sign for men when God's anger 'sets them on fire round about, and they know it not; when it burns them, and they lay it not to heart' (Isa. xlii. 25).

4. The withdrawings of Christ, in the case of a believer, the result of *love*. The greatest sign of wrath when men are allowed to sleep and sin on. 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.'

5. These withdrawings in *wisdom*, as well as in love. Wise as well as gracious reasons for them. (1) To teach the sin of neglecting divine calls and invitations. Such sin to be seen and lamented (Jer. ii. 19; Hos. v. 15). (2) To make His presence more prized. The value of a blessing best known when it has been withdrawn. The misery of Christ's absence to be sometimes learned by experience. Lamented absence better than slighted presence. (3) To prove the believer's love. Love unable to endure absence. (4) To render more watchful and careful in the future.

6. Divine withdrawings the believer's greatest distress. My soul failed (or fainted, as Genesis xlii. 28) when He spake (or, at His speaking — at the remembrance of what He had said). So with Peter (Matt. xxvi. 75). The Bride's felt calamity indicated by a double expression: 'Had withdrawn himself, and was gone.' The sweeter the past enjoyment of Christ, the greater the pain of His present withdrawal.

7. In the case of a believer, the joy of Christ's presence withdrawn, but not His love. David mourned the loss of the joy of God's salvation, but not of the salvation itself (Ps. li. 10).

Other lessons from the passage—

1. The remembrance of a Saviour's slighted calls, one day the bitterest ingredient in the sinner's cup. 'My soul failed when he spake.' Well when the remembrance is here, and not hereafter. An awful word to the rich man in hell: 'Son, remember' (Luke xvi. 25). One element of a true repentance, in the case of hearers of the Gospel, is the remembrance of a slighted Christ. The remembrance of past guilt an aggravation of present trouble.

2. Christ still loved by the believer in the midst of His withdrawing. 'My beloved,' &c. True love made more ardent by the withdrawing of its object. One of the lessons of the Song. Realized in the disciples after the Saviour's resurrection. The proof of a believer that he loves even an absent Christ.

3. Better to follow Christ in sorrow, than to live at ease in sin.

4. The more the soul has tasted of Christ's love, the more deeply it repents its coldness.

5. Means to be diligently employed to recover a missing Christ. 'I called, &c.

6. The prayer of a penitent believer not always immediately answered. 'He gave me no answer.'

7. A withdrawn Christ not immediately found. 'I sought Him, but I found Him not.' The Saviour's threatening to the Jews: 'Ye shall seek me but ye shall not find me.'

8. Sin often visited with a corresponding chastisement. The Bridegroom had called, and the Bride had not answered. Now *she* calls to him, but receives no answer. Observe in regard to

Answers to Prayer.

1. Answers to prayer, and the contrary, to be carefully noted and recorded.

2. Prayers not immediately answered not therefore rejected. Efforts not immediately successful not therefore in vain. The promise of finding made not to search begun, but persevered in. Believers' prayers often only apparently rejected. Never really unanswered without a greater benefit being bestowed. Moses not permitted to enter Canaan, but taken direct to a better land. Paul's thorn in the flesh not removed, but more of Christ's grace imparted to him. Direct answers to prayer often withheld for the best and wisest reasons (Job xxx. 20; Ps. xxii. 2; Lam. iii. 8, 44). Prayer often answered by terrible things in righteousness (Ps. lxv. 5).

3. Strength and grace given a believer still to pray even when no answer is received. Such grace often an equivalent for a direct answer. The greatest praise bestowed by Christ in the Gospels on one who still prayed earnestly after repeated repulses (Matt. xv. 21—28).

The Search and its Results.

Verse 7.

The watchmen that went about the city
Found me; they smote me; they wounded me:
The keepers of the walls
Took away my veil from me.

A painful experience awaited the Bride on returning to herself and her duty. Those who should have been for her protection and her help, now add to her distress. Her character suspected, and her veil taken from her as an immodest woman (Ezek. xxiii. 25, 26). Her experience in seeking the Bridegroom and the conduct of the watchmen towards her, much more painful than in a former search. The reason, *that* was *before* marriage, this *after* it. The greater our privileges, and the higher the degree attained in the Divine life, the greater the sin in backsliding from and unfaithfulness to it. Hence the greater the difficulty and the more painful the experience in returning to it. The ways of transgressors hard, even in the case of

Backsliders.

Often the most painful of all experiences connected with a missing Saviour, and a backslidden state. The very means of grace and messages of the Word often an aggravation of the grief. Promises apparently silent, and threatenings only uttering their voice. The two-edged sword of the Word felt only to cut and wound. Ministers seem only commissioned to smite. The backslider apt to lose the character of the spouse of Christ, and to be taken for a hypocrite. No help now, for a time at least, received from the ministers of the Word, as at a former period. No word now of Shulamite finding her beloved after only passing a little from them as before. Different effects from the preaching of the Word according to the condition of the hearer. Ministers and their messages only what the Master is pleased to make them. When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes his enemies to be at peace with him. When the opposite is the case, even his friends may be made to appear against him. Nevertheless, the conduct of the watchman unjustifiably rigorous, harsh, and unfeeling. On the part of

Ministers,

the greatest tenderness due to backsliders who are seeking Jesus sorrowing. The example of Jesus towards Peter. The bruised reed not to be ruthlessly broken. An untender minister a great affliction to an exercised soul. The 'tongue of the learned' required to 'speak a word in season to him that is weary' (Isa. l. 4). Sad when ministers talk to the grief of those whom God has wounded (Ps. lxix. 26). The part of hireling shepherds to thrust with the side and shoulder, and push at the diseased instead of healing them (Ezek. xxxiv. 21). A sore calamity to the Church when its pastors become brutish (Jer. x. 21). False shepherds hunt the souls of God's people, making the righteous sad, instead of binding up their wounds (Ezek. xiii. 20). The reproofs of ministers to be an excellent oil which shall not break the head (Ps. cxli. 5). The truth to be spoken, but to be spoken in love. Ministers to be both plain and faithful, but neither harsh nor severe. The conduct of the watchmen in the text realised in that of the Jewish priests and elders in their treatment of the spouse of Jesus after His departure to heaven (Acts iv. 1—3; v. 17, 18, 33, 40). The same spouse not unfrequently smitten by ecclesiastical rulers, as heretics and schismatics. Church rulers to be themselves a part of the spouse, and so acquainted with her exercises and temptations. Jesus Christ the model of Ministers. Had compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way. Is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Having Himself suffered in being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted (Heb. ii. 18; iv. 15; v. 2). Ministers to be not only lawfully called, but spiritually qualified.

The Charge.

Verse 8.

I charge you,
O ye daughters of Jerusalem;
If ye find my beloved,
That ye tell him that I am sick of love.

Shulamite probably still relates her dream. Receiving stripes instead of sympathy from the watchmen, she addressed herself to the women of the city. Such incongruities natural in a dream. The language that of—

1. *Intense concern:* 'I charge you,' &c. A kind of adjuration, as in chap. ii. 7; iii. 5; viii. 4; indicative of the unity of the poem. Observe—(1) The soul seeking a missing Saviour, glad to find sympathy and obtain help wherever it can. Necessity neglects no means. (2) Sad to find private Christians more sympathizing and helpful to exercised souls than the ministers of the Word. (3) Backsliding makes a believer an inquirer when he ought to have been a teacher. Guilt seals a believer's lips, which only a renewed sense of pardon can open (Ps. li. 12—15). (4) In darkness and desertion, others supposed to know better how and where to find Christ, and to have more access to Him, than the soul who is seeking Him. (5) Young believers sometimes found to have nearer access to Christ, and more sensible communion with Him, than those of greater experience. The strongest believers sometimes in a condition to be assisted by the weakest (Rom. i. 12). Times when the believer feels unable directly to address himself as usual to the Saviour. Power to pray not always present with the desire to pray. (6) The duty and privilege of earnest seekers of Jesus to request the prayers and assistance of others. Pride often the hindrance to the anxious soul obtaining peace. (7) Communion with Christians often the best way of finding a missing Christ. Believers to be able and ready to help others to find the Saviour.

2. Shulamite's language indicative of *confusion and distraction.* 'If ye find my beloved, that ye tell him,' &c.; literally: 'What shall ye tell him? that I am sick of love.' Hardly knows what she wants, and what message to send, or how to express her feelings. A state of great perturbation and perplexity natural to a soul seeking a loved but offended and missing Saviour. Shulamite's present case realized in Mary weeping beside the empty tomb, and addressing Jesus Himself as if He were the gardener: 'Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away' (John xx. 14, 15). Neither knowing to whom she spoke, nor what she said. Her soul absorbed with one thought, and not even naming the object of her search.

3. Her language that of *ardent affection.* 'Tell him that I am sick of love.' Formerly said in the enjoyment of Christ's presence; now in distress for His absence (chap. ii. 5). Love to Christ not dependent on present enjoyment, or confined to happy frames. Pursues Him when absent, as well as rejoices in Him when present. Observe, in reference to

Love-sickness for Christ,

That it is—

1. *Natural and reasonable.* This true, whether the sickness arise from the overpowering enjoyment of Christ's presence, as in chap. ii. 5; or, as here, from the painful sense of His absence. No reason in nature why love-sickness should exist in reference to an imperfect creature, and not to the all-perfect Creator, who has, at the same time in His love to me, become my Brother. Natural that the more excellent, lovely, and loving the object of our love, the more intense and ardent that love should be. Love due from an intelligent creature to the infinitely excellent Creator. That love not to be a cold and languid, lukewarm and formal love; but one ardent and intense—with all the heart, and soul, and strength, and mind—with all the affection which He has Himself implanted in our nature, and of which He is infinitely worthy (Rev. iii. 15, 16). The claims of a Creator upon our most ardent love unspeakably enhanced by those of a Redeemer. An evidence how far sin has blinded the mind, depraved the heart, and deadened the soul, that love-sickness for Christ is not as extensively experienced as the Bible is read and the Gospel preached. If the Creator, who is love and excellence itself, humbling Himself, in love, for the deliverance and happiness of His creatures, so as to assume those creatures' nature, and in that nature to be bound and spit upon, scourged and crucified—is not ardently loved by those who profess to believe they have been the objects of such love, the only reason must be that what the Bible declares about man's heart is true, that it is 'deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.' The day will declare what every truly awakened and enlightened soul even now sees to be true, that it is man's sin and shame that a creature should be loved with greater warmth, and longed for with greater intensity, than the Creator who died for them; and that the sentence pronounced by the inspired Apostle, and re-

corded in the Bible, is just: 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed' (1 Cor. xvi. 22).

2. *Blessed and desirable.* A love sickness according to truth and righteousness, and sure to obtain its end. A pain which those who feel it would not exchange, even for a moment, for all the pleasures of the world and sin during a lifetime. Ask Mary weeping at the empty grave, and the woman of the city washing the Saviour's feet with her tears. Love-sickness for Christ one of the evidences of spiritual health. Good to carry such sickness with us to the grave. Death only welcome and agreeable to those who love and long for Christ. Paul's experience: 'I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.' Death necessarily gain to the lovers of Christ, as it brings them to the sight and presence of Him 'whom having not seen they loved' (1 Peter i. 8; 1 John iii. 2). One of the strongest proofs of Christ's love to a soul is to make that soul sick of love for Himself. The prayer of Dr. Chalmers that of true enlightenment: 'O God, spiritualize my affections: Give me an ardent love to Christ.'

First Enquiry by the Daughters of Jerusalem.

Verse 9.

What is thy beloved more than another beloved,
O thou fairest among women?
What is thy beloved more than another beloved,
That thou dost so charge us?

Greater tenderness and consideration from the daughters of Jerusalem than from the watchmen of the city. The people of Jerusalem 'magnified' the early converts, while the priests and rulers sought to put them to death. The Spouse, in the eyes of the daughters of Jerusalem, the 'fairest among women;' in those of the watchmen of the city, a mere street-walker. That, in Christ and His Church, revealed to babes, which is hidden from the wise and prudent. Hopeful and others in Vanity Fair attracted to Christain and Faithful, while the rest mocked and persecuted them. A hopeful indication to discern the beauty and excellence of holiness, especially in times of persecution and spiritual desertion. Observe from the appellation given to the Bride—

1. Something especially lovely and beautiful in a believing soul earnestly seeking after a missing Christ. Grace in exercise makes the most plain-looking lovely.

2. Believers to appear in the [illegible] world what they really are—possessed of a spiritual beauty which exalts them above others. 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.' The Spouse of Christ the 'fairest among women.' The world to be compelled by a believer's life and spirit to acknowledge the reality and beauty of true religion. Christ's preciousness and excellence to be seen in the character and disposition of His people.

From the inquiry of the daughters of Jerusalem: 'What is thy beloved,' &c., observe—

1. Earnest search after a missing Saviour often blessed to the awakening of a spiritual concern in others. The 'daughters' especially struck with the earnest manner and language of the Bride: 'that thou dost *so* charge us.' Nothing more likely to impress others than earnestness in seeking Christ. One living, loving, earnest Christian may shake a whole Church and neighbourhood out of its slumbers.

2. The world to learn from the earnestness of believers that there is a preciousness in Christ not to be found in anything else.

3. The world and mere nominal professors of religion, ignorant of Christ's loveliness and excellence. This ignorance the reason why others are put in competition with Him, and preferred before Him.

4. Serious inquiry about Christ often the beginning of a new life. A hopeful inquiry of the Greeks: 'Sir, we would see Jesus.'

5. All have something as a 'beloved'—either Christ or something else. The world full of Christ's rivals and candidates for men's hearts.

6. Believers expected to give a reason for their attachment to Christ, and to show His superior excellence and claim to men's affection.

7. Christ infinitely above all other 'beloveds,' and supremely worthy of men's hearts; as (1) More excellent and lovely in Himself—the sum and source of all loveliness and excellence. (2) More satisfying as a portion, being more suited to man's nature and requirements. (3) More durable, never changing either in Himself or His love, and unable to be taken from us either in life or in death. (4) More loving and kind; having given the greatest proof of His love in what He has done and suffered for us—humbling Himself, laying down His life for us, seeking us in our wandering, and bearing with our weakness and waywardness. (5) The longer and better known, the more loved and admired. (6) Able, as being divine as well as human, to be loved with the whole heart, without danger either of idolatry or excess.

Shulamite's Description of her Beloved.

Verse 10—16.

Shulamite.

My beloved is white and ruddy,
The chief among ten thousand.

His head is as the most fine gold;
His locks are bushy,
And black as a raven.

His eyes are as the eyes of doves,
By the rivers of waters,
Washed with milk,
And fitly set.

His cheeks are as a bed of spices,
As sweet flowers;
His lips are like lilies,
Dropping sweet-smelling myrrh.

His hands are as gold rings,
Set with the beryl.

His belly (or body) is as bright ivory,
Overlaid with sapphires.

His legs are as pillars of marble,
Set upon sockets of fine gold.

His countenance is as Lebanon,
Excellent as the cedars.

His mouth is most sweet:
Yea, he is altogether lovely.

This is my beloved,
And this is my friend,
O ye daughters of Jerusalem.

In reply to the daughters of Jerusalem, Shulamite gives a full-length portrait of her beloved. The description one of enraptured admiration and affection. 'Superlatively glorious, and given in brief and comprehensible language.' Rich specimen of Oriental poetry. Observe from it—

1. Believers able to give a true, if not a full description of Jesus. Living Christians well acquainted with Christ, and able to give a reason of their love as well as their hope.

2. Believers to be ready to make others acquainted with Christ. This their calling and privilege. 'Ye shall be my witnesses.'

3. The joy of a living believer to testify for Jesus, and to guide inquirers to Him. 'I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.' Love *must* speak of its object.

4. Better to be employed in setting forth Christ's excellence, than in dwelling on our own defects or troubles.

5. Testimony concerning Jesus to be borne with heartiness and love. The truth to appear not only in the matter but the *manner* of our testimony.

6. Thoughts of Jesus, and the expression of them, the best anodyne for a troubled spirit. McCheyne's recipe: 'For one look at self take ten at Christ.' Confession *of* Christ often the shortest way to comfort *in* Christ. Speaking of Him for others, a precious help to our realizing Him for ourselves.

7. Testimony to Christ's loveliness and excellence for others, to be accompanied with a personal appropriation of Him for ourselves. 'This is my beloved,' &c. Preachers to commend Christ and speak of Him as their own Beloved and Friend.

8. Christ's excellence and preciousness the best subject for the fellowship of believers with each other. Believers thus to stir up their own love to Christ and that of others.

9. A pre-eminence and perfection of beauty in Jesus. The concentration of all creature loveliness. The union of all the elements of loveliness found in Him. The sum of all conceivable and all possible beauty and sweetness. 'Thou art fairer than the children of men.' The chief (conspicuous, or a standard-bearer) among ten thousand. The one Pearl of great price. Natural that the source of all beauty should Himself be the perfection of beauty.

10. The happiness of believers to be made to perceive, appreciate, and enjoy that beauty. Eyes anointed by the Spirit's eye-salve, and hearts renewed by His grace, required for that perception and appreciation.

11. The beauty and excellence of Christ made up of a variety of particulars. The holy perfume composed of various ingredients (Exod. xxx. 34, 35). His offices, relations, attributes, words and works, make up the one Christ.

12. Everything in Christ excellent and glorious in itself, as well as attractive and precious in the eyes of a believer. 'Altogether lovely;' or, 'all desirable things.' Christ an unalloyed congeries of excellencies and delights. Every divine and human perfection found in Him, and nothing but what is absolutely perfect.

13. That in Jesus which exceeds all description and all knowledge. The Bride breaks off as unable to describe the beauty and excellence of her beloved. A breadth, and length, and depth, and height in Jesus and His love, never to be fully comprehended. The duty and happiness of believers to *grow*

in the knowledge of Christ. All comparisons fall short of fully exhibiting Him. The most beautiful and excellent things in nature and art employed, but fail.

The description of the bridegroom inclusive of his dress and ornaments, as well as his person. That of a youthful prince eminent for dignity and beauty. Probably such as Solomon himself appeared to the eyes of beholders in the early period of his reign. Corresponds to his father's appearance at a similar age (1 Sam. xvi. 12). Not necessary to find in Jesus an exact counterpart in every particular. Yet every part suggestive of something to be found in Him. The application to be made as the Holy Spirit gives understanding. We have in

The Bridegroom's Portrait,

1. His *Complexion*. 'White and ruddy.' Fair and blooming. The perfection of a beautiful and healthy complexion. Suggests the Saviour's general loveliness, as well as His purity and spiritual health. 'Holy, harmless, undefiled.' 'Fairer than the children of men.' Recalls His spotless life and atoning death, as well as the union of the divine and human nature constituting the one God-man Redeemer. His meek and heavenly 'visage' not less lovely because, for our sakes, 'marred more than the sons of men.' His form not less beautiful because bruised and lacerated with the scourge and the nails, and 'ruddy with His own precious blood.'

2. His *Head*. 'As the most fine gold.' For excellence, a mass of pure and precious gold. Perhaps including an allusion to the golden crown which at times adorned it. Suggests the kingliness and nobility of Jesus, as well as His 'excellent wisdom.' 'Head over all things to His Church.' 'Head over all principality and power.' 'In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.'

3. His *Hair*. 'His locks are bushy (or curled and pendulous), and black as a raven.' Expressive of youthful and manly vigour. Jesus only known on earth as one in the prime and bloom of life. His death at the age of thirty-three. Jesus ever young. The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Appears in heaven 'as a Lamb that had been slain.' In another description of his appearance: 'his hair white as snow' (Rev. i. 14), as expressive of His eternity — the Ancient of Days. His raven locks perhaps symbolical of His human, and His snow-white hair of His divine, nature.

3. His *Eyes*. 'As the eyes of doves (or, as doves), by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set' (or, 'sitting in fulness'—in full streams). Suggestive of the love, tenderness, and gentleness of Him who was meek and lowly in heart; who, 'when He beheld the city, wept over it,' and when He saw the sisters of Lazarus weeping at his grave, and the Jews also weeping, wept along with them.

4. His *Cheeks*. 'As beds of spices' (or, balsams), as sweet flowers,' (or, 'towers of perfume'). The loving aspect of Jesus the index of His loving heart. His countenance ordinarily lighted up with gracious smiles that cheered the penitent, invited even publicans and sinners to draw near to Him, and made Him attractive even to little children. His benignant aspect made His presence like a bed of spices to such as, like Mary, 'sat down at His feet, hearing His words.

5 His *Lips*. Like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh.' Expressive either of the gracious words that proceeded from His mouth, and which, as recorded in the Scriptures, have been the comfort of millions ever since, or the sweetness felt in the communication of His love to the soul—'the kisses of His mouth' (chap. i. 2).

6. His *Hands*. 'As gold rings (or cylinders), set with the beryl' (chrysolite or topaz). The image probably from the rings that usually adorned the hands of Oriental princes. His hands themselves were as the costliest jewels. Suggestive of those works of benevolence and love—'wonderful and glorious'—wrought by Jesus when on earth, as well as those which, though invisible, He is working still, as the Head and High Priest of His Church.

7. His *Body*. 'His belly (or body) is as bright ivory, overlaid with sapphires.' The tender compassion of Jesus, combined with heavenliest purity. He who said: 'I have compassion on the multitudes,' said also: 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' 'Ye are from beneath; I am from above: Ye are of this world; I am not of this world' (John viii. 23, 46).

8. His *Legs*. 'As pillars of marble set upon sockets of fine gold.' The marble whiteness of His pillar-like legs suggestive of the spotless purity and integrity of His life, as well as His faithfulness and ability to support all who trust in Him. 'His feet like sockets of fine gold,' descriptive of Him who went about doing good. 'Beautiful on the mountains,' as the feet of Him who brought glad tidings to a perishing world.

9. His *Figure* or *General Aspect*. 'Like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.' The majesty and stateliness of His figure, resembling in its general character and aspect the 'goodly mountain' with its noble cedars, expressive of the amiable dignity of Him who

is both Son of God and Son of Man, the man that is Jehovah's fellow, the brightness of the divine glory, while not ashamed to call us brethren.

10. His *Mouth*. 'Most sweet.' Recalling the sweetness of the discourse of Him who 'spake as never man spake.' Suggestive also of the divine sweetness of that love which is 'better than wine.'

The enraptured and magnificent description closes 'with a holy admiration and amazement which ends in silence.' 'Yea, He is altogether lovely' (or, 'all of Him is lovely and desirable things.') Winds up with an emphatic

Appropriation of the Beloved.

'This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.'

Commendation of Christ to others to be accompanied with conscious choice and personal appropriation of Him by ourselves. That choice and appropriation of Christ by ourselves to be openly avowed while we commend Him to others. Conscious interest in Christ by ourselves, that which gives heart and life to our commendation of Him to others. The Bride's language expressive of—

1. The believer's personal apprehension of Christ's loveliness and excellence. 'This' —the person I have described to you—'is my Beloved.'

2. Choice of Him in preference to all other objects of attraction.

3. Appropriation and personal possession of Christ as our own.

4. Consciousness of such choice and appropriation. 'My Lord and my God.' 'I know whom I have believed.' 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'

5. Unchanged and unchanging attachment. 'My Beloved,' notwithstanding present appearances. 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him,' and love Him. 'I will wait on him who hideth himself.'

6. Full satisfaction with and glorying in Him as our choice and portion, our beloved and friend. 'My soul shall make her boast in the Lord.'

7. A bold and fearless confession of Him as the object of our choice, and the Saviour in whom we trust. Christ not only to be believed in with the heart, but confessed with the mouth (Rom. x. 9, 10).

8. Christ at once the believer's beloved and friend—beloved and lover. The love a mutual one. Christ, as

The Christian's Beloved,

Is loved—(1) For what He is in Himself—the 'chief among ten thousand,' and 'altogether lovely.' (2) For what He is to us, Saviour, Redeemer, husband, brother, and friend. (3) For what He has done for us —given Himself to humiliation and anguish, a bloody and shameful death, to satisfy, as our sacrifice and substitute, the demands of Divine justice upon us; sought us when we were wanderers; won our hearts, and espoused us to Himself as His own. That Christ is our beloved implies—(1) *Wonderful condescension and love* on the part of Christ, that sinners should be able to call Him their beloved. (2) *Precious grace*, that so changes the heart and renews the nature that we can thus truly and sincerely speak of Christ. (3) *Blessed condition of believers*, that they are able to claim Jesus as their beloved. Christ, as

The Christian's Friend,

Is—(1) Loving, generous, and sympathizing. (2) Faithful and true,—'sticketh closer than a brother.' (3) Unchanging—loving 'to the end.' (4) Rich and powerful. His hand able to answer the dictates of His heart. (5) Tried and proved—proved both by suffering *for* us, and suffering *from* us. Performs all the offices of a loving and faithful Friend—

1. Pays our debts.
2. Redeems our person.
3. Supplies our wants.
4. Comforts us in trouble.
5. Counsels us in difficulty.
6. Warns us of danger.
7. Reproves and corrects our faults.
8. Confides to us His secrets.
9. Delights in our society.
10. Entrusts us with His interests.
11. Defends our name and reputation.
12. Takes our part against all adversaries.

Christ a friend in need and a friend indeed. Rich and blessed the pauper who has Christ for his friend; poor and wretched the prince who has not. A man's highest wisdom to make Christ his friend while he may. Happy and only happy the man that can say of Him, 'this is my beloved, and this is my friend.' Reader, let this happiness be yours.

Second Inquiry by the Daughters of Jerusalem.

Chapter vi. Verse 1.

Whither is thy beloved gone,
O thou fairest among women?
Whither is thy beloved turned aside?
That we may seek him with thee

Result of Shulamite's description of her

beloved on the women of the city. Their sympathy excited, and a desire awakened partly to aid her in her search, and partly to see so beautiful and excellent a person for themselves. Shulamite supposed to know something of her beloved's haunts. Observe—

1. The faithful and loving tetimony for Christ not always unsuccessful. Often made the means of awakening in others the desire to seek Him and become acquainted with Him. 'Encouragement to be ready to commend a precious Christ.' Good for preachers and ministers to dwell on the beauty, excellence, and preciousness of the Saviour.

2. Earnest and loving seekers of a known Christ likely instruments in awakening the interest of others in regard to Him. A holy zeal for Christ the natural means of provoking many (2 Cor. ix. 2). Preachers, to be of use in winning others to Christ, must be in earnest about Him themselves, and be able to commend Him both as the Friend of sinners and their own.

3. One end of Christ's dealings with His people, that they may be the means of leading others to the knowledge and possession of Him. The troubles and afflictions of believers, spiritual as well as physical, often designed for the good of others as well as their own.

4. Every exhibition of Christ's preciousness and excellence to excite the desire to become personally acquainted with Him, and possess Him for ourselves. Description not to satisfy. 'Come and see.' Testimony to issue in personal knowledge. 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world' (John iv. 42).

5. Earnest seekers of Christ, bearing faithful testimony of Him to others, not likely to be alone in seeking Him. 'With Thee.' Thorough earnestness sympathetic. Hence Zech. viii. 20, 21. Apparent in extensive revivals of religion. The nature of enthusiasm, like fire, to extend itself. One heart kindled by the warmth of another.

6. Christ most likely to be found when sought in connection with the Bride—His living people. Good to seek Him alone; still better to seek Him with others who are able to help us.

7. 'With Thee,' an indication of the mystical and spiritual nature of the Song; otherwise an unacceptable compliment to the Bride.—*Henry.* Christ's true lovers and possessors, desire to see their number multiplied as much as possible. Joy in the possession of Christ by one, not diminished but increased, by the possession of Him by another. The Spouse of Christ one body, consisting of a multitude of individuals.

8. Earnestness required in seeking Christ. The earnestness of the 'daughters' seen in their repeated inquiry: 'Whither is thy beloved gone?' &c.

9. Knowledge of Christ and His ways to be sought with a view to seeking and professing Him. The inquiry of the women made with a practical object: 'That we may seek Him with thee.' An unpractical and uninfluential knowledge of Christ of little value. A knowledge of Christ merely 'after the flesh' to be renounced (2 Cor. v. 16).

10. Believers expected to know where Christ is to be found, and to be better acquainted with His ways than other people, so as to be able to guide them in their search after Him.

11. In regard to believers, Christ's absence only a temporary 'turning aside,' not a final departure. 'In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment' (Isa. liv. 7, 8). The covenant made with believers an everlasting covenant. 'I will betroth thee unto me for ever' (Hos. ii. 19). 'The Lord will not cast off His people' (Ps. xciv. 14; 1 Sam. xii. 22).

12. A soul never fairer than when earnestly seeking Christ. The earnestly seeking spouse addressed four times as the 'fairest among women.'

The inquiring 'daughters of Jerusalem' represented historically by the Greeks at the Feast, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, the women that followed Christ to the cross and observed the place of His interment, and by the inquirers on and after Pentecost—'devout men dwelling at Jerusalem, out of every nation under heaven' (Acts ii. 5, 14).

THE INQUIRY ANSWERED.

Verse 2.

SHULAMITE, *to the Daughters.*

My Beloved is gone down into his garden,
To the beds of spices;
To feed in the gardens,
And to gather lilies.

Shulamite continues her Narrative and Song. Relates her answer to the inquiring women. Suddenly recollects herself, and at once and unhesitatingly declares whither her Beloved is gone. 'He is gone down to his garden.' Literally, Solomon's garden in a valley below Jerusalem, on the South East. The allusion, however, probably to the Bride herself, already called 'his garden,' which he

had been invited by her to enter and 'eat his pleasant fruits' (chap. iv. 16). A delicate hint that the Bridegroom was expected to be with his Bride, and to find his chief enjoyment in her society. So Prov. v. 15—20. Christ the Bridegroom of His Church to be found in the assemblies of His people (Matt. xviii 20; Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14) Walks among the golden candlesticks (Rev. ii. 1). Never absent from His Church in general, though apparently and for a time from individual believers. Observe—(1) By commending Christ to others we often find Him ourselves. (2) The spiritual darkness of a believer often broken in upon by a ray of light which at once removes his difficulty and sorrow. Hagar's eyes had but to be opened to see the fountain by her side. 'Mary!' suddenly and in a moment turned her sorrow into joy. (3) Historically, Christ's body, after His crucifixion, found in Joseph's garden, and His Spirit in the paradise of God. The Bride's answer suggestive of what constitutes

The Saviour's Joy.

1. *The fellowship of His believing people on earth.* The Church His 'garden.' Separate congregations and individual believers His 'gardens. Christ goes down 'into His garden,' 'to feed in the gardens.' Indicated in His call to the Church at Laodicea: 'I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, I will come in unto him, and will sup with him, and he with Me' (Rev. iii 20). 'The Lord's portion is His people.' 'He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with singing' (Zeph iii. 17). The name given by Him to His Church: 'Hephzibah,' or 'my delight is in her.' 'The Lord taketh pleasure in His people.' 'He walketh in the midst of thy camp.' 'I will walk in you.' Christ delights in His Church and people as a man in his garden of fruits, flowers, and spices. Hence the responsibility resting on them to be such that Christ may find in them the enjoyment which He seeks. No unclean thing to be in Israel's camp. The garden to be kept clean and orderly for the proprietor's pleasure. Believers to keep their hearts and lives for Christ's sake as well as their own. The Church to purge out the old leaven of malice and wickedness. To put away from among them the wicked person. To keep the ordinances as delivered to them. To see that all things are done decently and in order (1 Cor. v. 7, 13; xi. 2; xiv. 40). Believers to see that they are bearing not only fruit, but much fruit. All the fruits of the Spirit to be produced in them—love, joy, peace, &c. (Gal. v. 22). 'I looked that it should bring forth grapes.' 'My soul desired the first ripe fruit.' His complaint that Israel was an empty (or yielding) vine, bringing forth fruit only to himself (Isa. v. 4; Mic. vii. 1; Hos. x. 1). Christ leaves His heritage, and 'gives the dearly beloved of His soul into the hand of her enemies, when it becomes to Him as a 'speckled bird' (Jer. xii. 7—11). A lukewarm Church or Christian He can only spue out of His mouth (Rev. iii. 16). Believers to see that no root of bitterness springing up trouble them, and defile the garden of Christ. Spices, as well as fruits, to be growing in Christ's garden. His people and Churches to be 'beds of spices'—fragrant and attractive, as well as useful.

2. *The presence of His people in heaven.* 'He goes down into His garden to gather lilies. Heaven a place of

Gathered Lilies.

Lilies, his believing people (chap. ii. 2). Gathered out of His garden on earth for His presence in heaven. Christ first transforms thorns into lilies, then transfers the lilies to Paradise. A world lying in wickedness not a place for His lilies to remain longer than is necessary. Every departed saint a gathered lily. The lilies enjoyed by Christ while growing in His garden below; still more when blooming in the Paradise above The lilies gathered in fulfilment of His own promise (John xiv. 2). Preserved safe with Himself till His return, when He brings them with Him (1 Thess. iv. 14; iii. 13; 2 Thess i. 10). Heaven delightful and attractive as the place of gathered lilies. 'The spirits of just men made perfect.' Those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Believers depart to be with Christ. 'To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.' Absent from the body, present with the Lord. Lazarus carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. Christ's lilies in heaven without a spot in them. 'Without fault before the throne of God.' Presented as a chaste virgin to Christ. Faultless before the presence of His glory. A glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. Holy and without blame before Him in love. All like Himself, seeing Him as He is. The former things passed away. The blessedness of heaven is, that it is free from all moral defilement. The happiness of the glorified, not so much that there is no more sorrow, as that there is no more sin. Christ's people lily-like here; much more hereafter. No remains of the thorn in heaven. The flesh carried to the grave, but no farther. The lilies gathered for Christ's own enjoyment as well as that of His people. Each departed believer an accession to the joy of heaven

and of heaven's King. Christ's heaven to have the hundred and forty and four thousand of His redeemed around Him on Mount Zion, praising the Father in the midst of the General Assembly and Church of the First-born the (Heb. ii. 12; xii. 23). Hence—(1) A reason why believers should gladly leave this world. (2) A ground of sweet consolation in regard to friends who fall asleep in Jesus. (3) Believers not to grudge Christ the lilies which He gathers.

Renewed Self-Dedication.

Verse 3.

Shulamite.

I am my beloved's
And my beloved is mine:
He feedeth among the lilies.

Shulamite repeats in presence of the Daughters the declaration of her devotedness to and interest in her beloved which she had formerly made to himself (chap. ii. 16). The declaration possibly now also made in his presence, at the conclusion of her narrative. Perhaps the whole sung in his presence at the Feast, or he himself comes now in view. The language of exultation and joy, as well as of devotedness and love. Observe—

(1) Faith and love in a believer never dead, though sometimes in a swoon. True faith like wood rather than iron—if it sink, it will rise again. A believer's falls not final. 'I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not' (Luke xxii. 32).

2. Withdrawals on the part of Christ no proof of abated love (John xiii. 1; Isa. liv. 8). The covenant of grace too firmly established to be broken by the infirmities of the flesh. That covenant steadfast, because of grace and not of works. Christ betroths believers to Himself in faithfulness for ever, because in righteousness and judgment, in loving kindness and in mercies (Hos. ii. 19, 20). The the way transgressors always hard; but transgression unable to cast out of the covenant of grace as it did out of the covenant of works. God's faithfulness not affected by His people's falls. The gifts and calling of God without repentance or change of mind on His part. He pardons His people's sins though He takes vengeance on their inventions. Rebukes not only consistent with covenant love, but a necessary part of it. The Bridegroom bears with the Bride's ill manners in the wilderness, though He wisely expresses His displeasure. Withdraws the joy of salvation for a time, though not the salvation itself.

3. The chastened and penitent believer restored to the full consciousness of his interest in Christ, and with that to joy and comfort. Joy unspeakable in a conscious interest in Christ and full surrender to Him.

4. Good for a believer frequently to recal his covenant relationship to Christ, his self-surrrender to Him, and his interest in Him. Paul's comfort in prison,—'I know whom I have believed; and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day' (2 Tim. i. 12).

5. Surrender of ourselves to Christ, and acceptance of Him, the two sides of a saving faith. 'I am His,' indissolubly connected with 'He is mine.' The two confirmatory of each other. Interest *in* Christ necessarily follows surrender *to* Christ. The consciousness of the one bound up with the consciousness of the other. Those fleeing to Christ and closing with Him may safely conclude that Christ is theirs.

6. The order of the two first clauses of the text changed from what it was before. The bride's declaration of self-surrender now *first*, as having been placed in suspicion by her recent coolness. So Peter, after his threefold denial, must make a threefold declaration of his love. Renewed and open declaration of our faith and love necessary to full restoration to former enjoyment.

7. Christ's presence, both on earth and in heaven, among His lily-like people. 'He feedeth among the lilies.' His presence promised to His Church till the end of the world, when faith is changed to sight. Christ both feeds others and has joy Himself in His Church and its ordinances. To enjoy His presence and His care we must be among the lilies. 'Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.' No mark of Christ's sheep to 'separate' ourselves from the flock. The happiness of believers to find themselves among Christ's people and in the enjoyment of His ordinances. 'All my springs are in thee.'

8. The text historically verified in the disciples after Christ's resurrection. 'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.' The language of Shulamite that of Mary at Jesus's feet — 'Rabboni,' — 'My Master!' That of Thomas with his finger on the nail-prints,—'My Lord and my God!' That of penitent Peter,—'Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee.'

The King's Admiration of His Bride.

Scene Second. Place: *The Royal Garden.* **Speaker:** *The King to Shulamite.*

Verse 4—10.

THE KING.

Thou art beautiful, O, my love, as
Tirzah,
Comely as Jerusalem,
Terrible as an army with banners.
Turn away thine eyes from me,
For they have overcome me.
Thy hair is as a flock of goats,
That appear from Mount Gilead.
My teeth are as a flock of sheep,
Which go up from the washing,
Whereof every one beareth twins,
And there is not one barren among
them.
As a piece of pomegranate
Are thy temples within thy locks.

There are threescore queens,
And fourscore concubines,
And virgins without number:
My dove, my undefiled, is but one;
She is the only one of her mother;
She is the choice one of her that bare
her.

The daughters saw her,
And blessed her;
Yea, the queens and the concubines,
And they praised her:—
'Who is she that looketh forth as the
morning,
Fair as the moon,
Clear as the sun,
Terrible as an army with banners?'

The king himself now appears, and expresses his joy in and admiration of his bride, notwithstanding her temporary coldness. Perhaps found by her in the royal gardens, where she had gone to seek him. Possibly only her exclamation on the conclusion of her song at the Marriage Feast. The place and circumstances of the dialogue now more difficult to determine. The application or spiritual meaning of the allegory, however, under the Spirit's teaching, not difficult to find. Among the truths suggested by the passage, we notice—

1. Christ's love not forfeited by His people's falls. Shulamite is still 'my love.' So Christ revealed Himself after His resurrection to His disciples, who had forsake Him and fled; and to Peter, who had thrice denied Him.

2. Earnest seeking after Christ sure to be followed by a happy finding of Him. Fervent longings for His presence succeeded by sweet enjoyment of it. Faith in and love to an unseen Christ sure of His blessing (John xx. 29).

3. The penitent believer, seeking Christ sorrowing, the object of His admiration and delight.

4. Christ's withdrawal from and silence towards His erring people not of long continuance. 'In a little wrath, I hid my face from thee for a moment,' &c. (Isa. liv. 9).

5. Christ returns to His people in love when they return to Him in penitence. No upbraiding for past sin. Lays the lost sheep on His shoulder, and returns with it rejoicing (Luke xv. 4).

6. The fruit of chastening after a fall only greater endearment.

7. Christ's views of His people, like His love towards them, unchanged by their falls. Their beauty, on repentance, the same in His eyes as before. The diamond a diamond still, notwithstanding temporary sullying. The beauty of nature fading; that of grace, fast colours.

8. Beauty a character essentially belonging to the Church and believers. 'Thou art beautiful.' Observe, in regard to the

Church's Beauty.

1. A moral and spiritual beauty to be recognized, as well as a corporeal or sensuous one. The former as far superior to the latter as the soul and spirit is more excellent than the body, and the divine nature is superior to the human. Spiritual beauty, or the beauty of holiness, a portion of the beauty that is in God Himself; or rather is that beauty itself. Holiness the divine nature and image. Its essence love. That moral and spiritual beauty the beauty of believers. Believers renewed in the image of God. Made partakers of the divine nature. Conformed to

the image of Christ, the perfection of beauty. Love the essential feature in their character, and that which distinguishes the children of God. 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity (love), I am as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal,' &c. (1 Cor. xiii. 1). That love, embracing both God and man, the sum of moral beauty, or the beauty of holiness. Believers chosen in Christ by God the Father, and blessed with all spiritual blessings, that they should be holy and without blame before Him in love (Eph. i. 4). Beautified with salvation — salvation from sin into holiness. The Church's holy beauty the delight of her divine Lord (Ps. xlv. 10, 11). The Bride's beauty compared to that of Tirzah, the royal city of one of the ancient kings of Canaan, and afterwards the metropolis of the kings of Israel. In Solomon's time the northern, as Jerusalem was the southern, capital of Palestine. Its name, denoting the 'pleasant' or 'agreeable,' probably given from its situation or appearance.

9. A comeliness as well as a beauty belonging to the Church and to believers. 'Comely as Jerusalem.' Comeliness closely allied to beauty. Conveys the additional idea of pleasantness. The sweetness and the pleasantness of beauty. Shulamite comely —pleasant to look upon and converse with, as well as beautiful. In this respect also the Bride's beauty a counterpart and reflection of the Bridegroom: 'Thou art fair, my beloved; yea, pleasant' (chap. i. 16). A comeliness, as well as a beauty, in holiness. The one to be cultivated and exhibited by believers as well as the other. Believers to be, like Christ, not only loving but lovely. Their character to embrace not only whatsoever things are true, just, and pure, and honest, but 'whatsoever things are lovely' (Phil. iv. 8). Christ not only the holiest, but the most *attractive* of men, even to publicans, and sinners, and little children. Believers to resemble Him by imbibing His Spirit. 'Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.' 'Love one another as I have loved you.' Shulamite's comeliness compared to that of 'Jerusalem.' Jerusalem the city of the great King. Beautiful for situation. The joy of the whole earth. At first a stronghold of the Jebusites; afterwards the metropolis of Palestine and residence of the kings of Judah. Its name— the 'City or Foundation of Peace.' Mostly surrounded by mountains. Compactly built. Fortified by lofty walls. Adorned with palaces. Beautified and ennobled especially by the temple, the peculiar abode of Jehovah, in the midst of it. An emblem of the Church in its unity and brotherhood, its security and peace, and especially in its being the chosen habitation of God through His Spirit' (Eph. ii. 20, 21). The Church's beauty not so much her own as that of Him who dwells in her.

10. A terribleness as well as comeliness in the Church's beauty. 'Terrible as an army with banners.' Something in extraordinary beauty that awes beholders and forbids approach. 'Terror in love and beauty, not approached by stronger hate.'—*Milton.* A terribleness in holiness or spiritual beauty. 'He perceived how awful goodness is, while in its form most lovely.' Terribleness and beauty combined in the Church when enjoying much of the Divine presence and blessing. 'Kings of armies did flee apace,' while Israel was 'as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold' (Ps. lxviii. 12, 13. So Ps. xlviii. 1—6). The people magnified the Pentecostal Church at Jerusalem, while awed by its holiness and afraid to join themselves t its (Acts ii. 43; v. 13). Paul terrible both to Felix and Agrippa. Believers walking in their true character as kings and priests to God, not only amiable but awful. Observe, in regard to

The Church's Terribleness,

I. *The* GROUNDS *of it.*

1. *Her holy and spiritual character.* The Church terrible through the heavenly walk and spirit of her members. One believer, by this Christ-like spirit, able to overawe a multitude.

2. *The presence of Christ, promised to His Church and to His people individually.* 'God is in the midst of her.' 'I am with you alway.' 'Wherever two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.'

3. *The power committed to her.* 'Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come you.' 'Tarry ye in Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.' That power exhibited—(1) In the Church's prayers and the *answers* to them. 'By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us.' The earthquake at Philippi connected with the prayers of Paul and Silas in the prison. The power of Elijah's prayers to be repeated in the Church of Christ (James v. 16—18; Rev. xi. 6). The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints ascending up before God, followed by 'voices and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake' (Rev. viii. 4, 5). (2) In the Church's *ordinances*, and especially its faithful *preaching*. 'Strength' as well as 'beauty' in God's sanctuary. Power with the Word, both to convince and to convert. The hearers

is 'convinced of all and judged of all, and the secrets of his heart made manifest; so that falling down on his face he worships God and reports that God is among you for truth' (1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25). So Felix trembled before Paul. 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds' (2 Cor. x. 4). (3) In its *discipline*. A disciplinary power committed to the Church by its Head,—to bind and to loose, to remit or to retain sins (Matt. xvi. 19; xviii. 18; John xx. 23). The Kingdom of God not in word but in power. 'I have judged already, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus' (1 Cor. iv. 20; v. 3—5). Effects of the spiritual and faithful exercise of discipline by the Church realized from the age of the Apostles to our own.

II. *The* OBJECTS *of it*. The Church terrible to her adversaries (2 Cor. x. 4). So Israel in the wilderness (Deut. xxxiii. 29; ii. 25; Exod. xv. 14—16; Num. xxiv. 5; Ps. xlviii. 5, 6; lxviii. 12). 'Satan trembles when he sees,' &c. A holy Church and a spiritual believer the terror of the devil. 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?' The Church terrible in the eyes of her adversaries only as she is beautiful in those of Christ. More formidable to her enemies when arrayed in the beauties of holiness, than when armed with Acts of Parliament, and the sword of the civil magistrate. The Church, when faithful, ever terrible to her adversaries and to the world in general. Tyrants made to tremble by the constancy and firmness of believers (Acts xxiv. 25). Mary, Queen of Scotland, more afraid of Knox's prayers than of an army of soldiers. Attila overawed by Leo and his attending presbyters. Sin and ungodliness often put to shame by the zeal and consistency of a single believer (Heb. xi. 33—35). Christ's weak Bride, both collectively and individually, mightier by her faith, holiness, and prayers, than the combined hosts of earth and hell. Samson in his locks of consecration and Nazariteship, a terror to the Philistines.

III. *The* NATURE *of her terribleness*. 'As an army with banners.' The Church terrible in her militant character as arrayed against the powers of evil. An army with banners terrible from its arms and armour flashing in the sun, its numbers, its order and array, its unity and compactness, its courageous spirit, determined mien, undaunted aspect, and firm step; resolved to conquer or to die in the conflict. The Church of Christ terrible as an

Army with Banners,

1. *With Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, as its commander-in-chief*, the Captain of the Lord's host, the Captain of our salvation. The Church led on by Him who has already 'overcome the world,' and 'spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them in His cross' (Col. ii. 15; John xvi. 33).

2. *Marshalled under subordinate leaders*. 'He gave gifts; some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers' (Eph. iv. 8—11). Every pastor and Church ruler an officer under Christ.

3. *Arrayed with goodly order, and governed by wholesome discipline*. The Apostle's joy in beholding the 'order' of the Church at Colosse (Col. ii. 5). His direction: 'Let all things be done decently and in order' (1 Cor. xiv. 40.) A Church with Scripture order and discipline something terrible to the world.

4. *Divided into various sections*. Israel marched through the wilderness in four divisions, exclusive of the Levites (Num. x. 14—28). One Church and yet many Churches. An army composed of many regiments, each with its own uniform and banner, yet serving one King and obeying one Commander-in-chief. Christian Societies and Missions in the Church as the battalions and squadrons of an army.

5. *Animated with one spirit*. Unity without uniformity the order of Christ's army. One body and one spirit; one faith and one baptism (Eph. iv. 4, 5). The Church's terribleness seen and felt when its members stand 'steadfast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel' (Phil. i. 27).

6. *Furnished with suitable armour and weapons*. The armour of Christ's Church —the helmet of the hope of salvation; the breast-plate of righteousness, faith, and love; the girdle of truth; the shoes of the Gospel of peace; the shield of faith. As John Bunyan remarks—no armour for the *back*. Christ's soldiers expected not to flee but to fight. Their weapons the arrows of truth, the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and earnest, believing, and persevering prayer. Believers' armour a panoply provided by God Himself—'the whole armour of God' (Eph. vi. 13—18; 1 Thes. v. 8). The armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left (2 Cor. vi. 7). Their weapons not carnal, but mighty through God (2 Cor. x. 4).

7. Distinguished by appropriate banners. Israel's host in the wilderness said to have marched under four standards (Num. x. 14—28). A banner given by Christ to be displayed because of the truth. His banner that waves over His people, Love. Christ himself set up for an ensign. Some of the emblems on the Church's banners—a Lamb as it had been slain; a Cross; a Shepherd, carrying a lamb in His bosom. Some of their mottoes: 'Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world.' 'He loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.' 'The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.'

The army of the Church composed of all who as sinners accept of Christ as a Saviour, and surrender themselves to Him as their King. Every true conversion to Christ an enlistment. Every genuine Christian a soldier of Jesus Christ. Baptism and Church membership a nominal enrolment. The baptized and professors found in the ranks of the world and the devil, deserters from Christ. Professing Christians, with the *heart* still in the world, traitors in the camp. The Church, as an army, not only *prepared* for battle, but always in it. Its enemies the world, the flesh, and the devil. Their worst enemy within—fleshly lusts that war against the soul—the law in the members warring against the law of the mind (1 Pet. ii. 11; Rom. vii. 23). The devil to be daily resisted (1 Pet. v. 8, 9). The world to be overcome by the disciple as by the Master and in the Master's strength (1 John v. 4, 5). The world to be won for Christ. Hardness to be endured as by good soldiers. Perseverance in the conflict to be maintained to the end. Victory certain. Every believer already a conqueror, fully in Christ and partly in his own person. The conflict hastens to a close. The crowning at hand.

The true and spiritual Church of Christ, 'His body and the fulness of Him that filleth all in all,' the living embodiment of Christianity. That Christianity 'no failure; not feeble, but strong; not vanquished, but valorous and victorious; a spiritual power in the midst of a godless world; working in the early centuries, and during the middle ages, and ever since; working in spite of resistance and corruption, in spite of violence and sophistry, in spite of errors and perversions; often apparently imperilled, but never really overcome; assailed, but invincible; warred against, but triumphant.'—*Stoughton's Ages of Christendom.*

Christ's joy in His Church not only from her beauty and comeliness, but her *terribleness.* Believers never fairer in His eyes than when going forth in His strength to the spiritual conflict, and fighting the good fight of faith. The Bridegroom delights in contemplating his Bride as an army with banners led on by Himself as Her Captain. The Church often fairest in Christ's eyes when foulest in the eyes of the world. Most like her Lord when incurring the world's hatred, because testifying against its sin. 'Me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil.' 'If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you' (John vii. 7; xv. 18).

The description in the text realized in the Pentecostal Church to the present day. To be so still more hereafter (Rev. xix. 8, 14).

The Bridegroom acknowledges the power of the Bride's beauty over himself. 'Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me.' Eyes mentioned as the principal seat of beauty, and the expression of the soul. The language of the eye often more powerful than that of the tongue. A look from Christ broke Peter's heart; a look from Peter overcomes His own. The part of the believer to have power with God as well as with men; with God first, then with men. The believer's power with Christ in the look of penitence, dependence, and prayer. 'He wept and made supplication unto him. He had power with the angel and prevailed' (Hos. xii. 3, 4). Christ unable to hold out against the beseeching eye of the woman of Sidon. The pleading eye of the penitent thief drew forth from the dying Saviour His longest utterance on the cross. The eyes of the Spouse like those of doves. The more dove-like the believer, the more power he has with Christ. Doves' eyes overcome the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. The proper character of the believer's eyes that they 'are ever toward the Lord' (Ps. xxv. 15). Not lofty, but waiting on the Lord until he have mercy (Ps. cxxiii. 1, 2; cxxxi. 1). Hence the believer strongest when he is weakest. Paul's paradox: 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' 'The lame take the prey.' 'Christ constrained by the earnest love of His dependent people (Luke xxiv. 29, 30).

The particular description now given of the Bride's beauty mostly a repetition of a former one (chap. iv. 1, &c.). Lips, neck, and breasts, only now omitted.

Observe—

1. The Church's beauty a permanent one. May, however, be more fully exhibited at one time than another. The same parts and features not always equally developed. In the Seven Churches, some things commended, and the want and weakness of others reproved. The Church at Ephesus praised for its patience and its works, but blamed for having left its first love. Israel's love warmest at the earliest period of their

history. 'I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals.' Peter's fall brought his love into question, and perhaps for a time cooled its ardour. 'Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.' Young converts to preserve the ardour of their first love, and so to guard against the chilling influence of the world around them. Probably the earliest and the latest periods of the Church's history those of its greatest spiritual beauty. Believers to seek to cultivate *all* the graces of the Spirit. To be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. To pursue, possess, and exhibit whatsoever things are true, just, pure, honest, lovely, and of good report: 'if there be any virtue and if there be any praise.'

2. Christ's love to His Church unchanged and unchanging. Speaks comfort according to the requirements of her case. Assurance of continued love and esteem needed after reproof for undutiful conduct. So with Peter after his fall. The charge to feed Christ's lambs and sheep renewed as often as he had before denied His Master.

3. Truth requires repetition. Believers need to be reminded of what they have heard, and to have their minds stirred up by way of remembrance (Phil. iii. 1; 2 Pet. iii. 1, 2). More earnest heed to be given to the things we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. Line to be given upon line, and precept upon precept. Truth not easily imprinted on the mind so as to be retained, recollected, and always realized. The Spirit specially given to bring to our remembrance whatsoever Christ has said to us in His Word. Words spoken by Christ to His disciples after His resurrection those He had spoken before, but which they had either not understood or had forgotten (Luke xxiv. 44). Words spoken by Christ must be spoken again by *Himself*, in order to have their relish and effect. Believers to be frequently reminded of their proper character and holy calling as Christ's Bride, in order to be the more careful to exemplify that character, and to walk according to that calling.

The Bride commended by the Bridegroom as superior to all others. 'There are threescore queens,' &c. Possible allusion to the Ladies of an Oriental Harem. Something similar in Solomon's own Court at a later period of his life (1 King xi. 1—3). Perhaps only a comparison intended between Shulamite and all other women, even the queens, concubines, or secondary wives, and virgins, or candidates for that position, belonging to all Oriental Courts. Solomon's Bride attended by ladies of high rank. King's daughters among his 'honourable women,' while the queen stood at his right hand, accompanied by her virgins (Ps. xlv. 9, 14). The comparison viewed in relation to the

Church of Christ,

Suggestive of—

1. *The excellence of Christ's Church or true believers.* None of all the queens, concubines, or virgins to be compared with Shulamite. Christ's 'little flock' more beautiful and precious in His eyes than all other members of the human family, whatever their position, talents, or acquirements. This, however, not from anything in themselves, either original or acquired by their own efforts. 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' 'Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty,' &c. 'God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him.' Christ's chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people His 'beautiful flock.' Made comely with His comeliness put upon them. The best and most gifted of unrenewed men, in comparison to the subjects of His grace, but as 'chaff to the wheat.' The saints in Cesar's household the true royalty—kings and priests unto God. The true 'Sons of Zion,' as partakers of Christ and His Spirit, 'comparable to fine gold.' Out of Christ, men at the best but flesh, and carnally minded. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. But the mind of the flesh is enmity against God. To be carnally-minded is death. The carnal mind not subject to the law of God, nor can be. 'In me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing.' Apart from renewing grace, men have not the love of God in them. The character of the unregenerate, that they love the praise of men more than the praise of God; are alienated from the life of God; are without God in the world; and do not seek after God, but mind earthly things. The comparison in the text true also of the Church of Christ collectively, as a visible and organized community, in relation to all other bodies of men, whether civil or religious. True, notwithstanding all the defects to be found in the Church visible; but true in the degree in which it approaches the Scriptural model, 'the pattern showed in the Mount.' The reason is, that the Holy Spirit is ever more or less at work in it, renewing men in the image of God. 'The abode of the Spirit in the Church, from Pentecost, is a fact. A succession of ages is presented, on all of which the Spirit sets a seal.' Even in those

ages, 'overshadowed by ignorance and spiritual despotism, the light of the Spirit's presence may be traced amidst the gloom; not only amongst those who stood apart from the corruptions of Christendom, but even in the heart of the Roman Church. Faith, love, and purity may be found in the lives of many in that communion; connected, it is true, with error and superstition, with much that was foolish, and worse than foolish; but yet faith, love, and purity were there—all the more manifestly, indeed, for the evils and hindrance that surrounded them.' — *Stoughton's Ages of Christendom.*

2. *The Unity of the Church.* 'My love, my undefiled is one, the only one of her mother.' This unity farther expressive of the Church's excellence. Shulamite more precious and excellent in her mother's eyes than all her other children, and in her Bridegroom's eyes than all the Queens, concubines, and virgins united. Her excellence enabled her to stand alone—one against ten thousand. Perfection needs no help or addition, and admits of none. The one diamond in the ring more precious than all the stones set round about it. The Church of Christ *one in herself.* 'Jerusalem is a city that is compact together' —united or made one in herself. 'One body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.' Apostles and other gifts bestowed by the Church's Head, 'for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in (or into) the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. iv. 4, 5, 12, 13). The Church many individuals, and many separate congregations and organizations, but one Church. Its true members the one Bride of Christ, united to Him by a living faith, and inhabited by His Spirit. United also to each other by a substantially common faith; by a common inward life, which is Christ Himself living in them by His Spirit; by a common birth and common nature, that of the Spirit, in virtue of which they are all made God's children; and by a common love, as, notwithstanding all their diversities, brethren of each other. Christ's prayer that that unity might be increasingly and perfectly developed and displayed to the world. That unity much more precious than uniformity in rites, ceremonies, and Church government, and independent of it. Exhibited in the Lord's Supper: 'We, being many, are one bread.'

8. *The greatness of Christ's love to His Church.* Solomon's love concentrated on Shulamite. So Christ's love in regard to His redeemed. Israel loved by Jehovah with a peculiar love (Deut. vii. 7, 8; Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20; cxlviii. 14). The Lord 'loveth the stranger to give him food and raiment:' but loved Israel with the love of a Bridegroom. 'You only have I known of all the nations of the earth.' The love of the Father and of Christ to the Church, also a peculiar love. A general divine love towards all mankind. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,' &c. A special love to His Church. Christ 'loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.'

4. *The undividedness of the Church's love to Christ.* 'My dove, my undefiled.' Shulamite's love to the Bridegroom that of the dove, distinguished for its undivided attachment to its mate. Herself 'undefiled,' as loving him with an undivided love. The mark of Christ's true Spouse to be able to say: 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none on earth that I desire besides Thee.' 'What have I to do any more with idols?' 'What things were gain to me, these I counted loss for Christ: yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ.' 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.' The whole heart sought by Christ, and yielded through His grace. 'My son, give me thy heart.' His complaint against the nominal Israel: 'Their heart is divided.' The prayer of the regenerate: 'Unite my heart that I may fear Thy name.' The part of grace to make the double heart single.

5. *The smallness of the Church as compared with the world.* Shulamite one; the queens, concubines and virgins many. So with the true spiritual Church of Christ at any period of her history. In comparison with the world, and even with religious professors, Christ's believing people but a 'little flock.' 'We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.' Among the Gentiles, as in Israel, the saved only a 'remnant according to the election of grace.' The gate of life straight, and 'few there be that find it.' The prophet's complaint regarding Israel a general one: 'Who hath believed our report?' So the Saviour's own, as addressed to the multitude: 'Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.' The Gospel preached among the nations to 'take out a people for His name.' God hath 'chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty.' Christ's Church His 'hidden ones,' whom 'the world knoweth not, even as it knew Him not.' Yet collectively, a 'multitude that no man can num-

ber, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues' (Rev. vii. 9).

Shulamite represented in the text as an object of admiration and praise to spectators. 'The daughters saw her, and blessed her (pronounced her happy)' &c. The Bride's beauty and excellence thus strongly commended by her royal Bridegroom, who extols her as the object of admiration to those who might have been her rivals. The New Testament Church and converted Israel similarly spoken of by the prophet. 'Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed' (Isa. lxi. 9). Jerusalem to be made a praise in the earth and a joy of many generations (Is. lx. 15; lxii. 7). Israel was to be an object of admiration and wonder to other lands, on account of the wisdom and understanding through the Divine law which had been committed to them, and to be made 'high in praise, and in name, and in honour above all the nations' (Deut. iv. 6; xxvi. 19; Jer. xxxiii. 9). A thing which actually happened (Ezek. xvi. 14; 1 Kings x. 8). So after the effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the people collected from every nation under heaven, wondered when they heard the illiterate Galilæans declaring in all their respective languages, 'the wonderful works of God.' Subsequently, the infant Church at Jerusalem 'had favour with all the people' who 'magnified them' (Acts ii. 6—11, 47; v. 13). The rulers, 'seeing the boldness of Peter and John, marvelled, and took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.' The council 'looking steadfastly on Stephen' as he stood before them, 'saw his face as it had been the face of an angel' (Acts iv. 13; vi. 15). King Agrippa, hearing and seeing Paul, 'almost persuaded' to become a Christian. The testimony of the heathen in regard to the early Christians: 'See how these Christians love one another!' 'They are astonished who behold thy order.'—*Theodoret.* Believers the living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men. So to live that others seeing their good works may glorify their Father who is heaven. 'They magnified the grace of God in me' (Gal. i. 24). Men to see that faith in Jesus makes believers not only holy but happy. Others to be attracted to Christ by what they see in His people (Zech. viii. 23). 'Now I saw in my dreams that Christian went not forth alone; for there was one whose name was Hopeful (being so made by beholding of Christian and Faithful in their words and behaviour, in their sufferings at the Fair), who joined himself unto him. Thus one died to bear testimony to the truth, and another rises out of his ashes to be a companion with Christian in his pilgrimage.' The language of the admiring daughters apparently given: 'Who is she that looketh forth,' &c. Perhaps the exclamation of the king's female attendants, as they saw Shulamite enter the garden while they had accompanied him. The language, not of ignorance, but of admiration. That in the Church of Christ fitted to awaken the wonder and admiration of the world. The Church a wonder in heaven (Rev. xii. 1). The Apostles a 'spectacle to the world, to angels and to men' (1 Cor. iv. 9). In reference to

New Testament Believers,

The language suggestive of—

I. *Their* POSTURE. 'That looketh forth as the morning.' Indicates—

1. *Deliverance and change for the better.* The morning looks forth out of the darkness of the night. The shadow of death turned into the morning. The case—(1) Of the Church at and after Pentecost. 'Ye shall have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice.' Darkness made light before them. 'The day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness.' 'The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.' At Pentecost the light of the moon made as the light of the sun. (2) Of believers at conversion. 'His going forth is prepared as the morning.' The converted and believing soul goes forth out of darkness into light, out of bondage into liberty, out of death into life. 'Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace.' Believers are children of the light and of the day. Not of the night nor of the darkness. Possess of the day-star in their hearts. (3) Of the Church at the Resurrection. All comparatively night with the Church till Jesus comes. Her chief beauty and blessedness connected with His glorious appearing, when she looks forth from the night of tribulation and the darkness of the grave. 'In the beauty of holiness, from the womb of the morning, thou hast the dew of thy youth.' 'He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe' (2 Thess. i. 10).

2. *Cheerfulness and confidence.* The face not now hidden or cast down from sorrow, shame, or fear. From Mount Olivet the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy. After Pentecost they 'did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God.' The council marvelled at the boldness of Peter and John, and saw the face of Stephen as the face of an angel.

Believers having peace with God through Jesus Christ, rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, glory in tribulation, and have joy in God Himself (Rom. v. 1, &c.). Conscious enjoyment of God's favour the health of a man's countenance. In Christ we receive at conversion, 'not the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father!' Confidence towards God a fruit of faith in His Son. He hath given us, 'not the spirit of fear, but of love, power, and of a sound mind.' The promise connected with the Lord's appearing: 'For their shame they shall have double; and for their confusion they shall rejoice in their portion' (Isa. lxi. 7).

3. *Interest in others.* The law of Christ's kingdom: 'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.' Believers after Pentecost looked forth with pity and concern on a world lying in wickedness. Their calling: 'Ye shall be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.' Preach 'repentance and the forgiveness of sins in My name to all nations.' 'Freely ye have received; freely give.' The Gospel committed to the Church for the world's salvation. Believers to hold forth to others the Word of life. To look forth on the multitudes with the bowels of Christ. To go, in the spirit and steps of their Master, to 'seek and save that which is lost.' The world to be won for Christ.

II. *Their* APPEARANCE. A threefold comparison—

1. '*Fair as the moon.*' The moon, with her borrowed light, an object of beauty for the whole earth she looks upon. Beautiful when rolling on with unclouded grandeur. So Homer—

——The moon, refulgent lamp of night,
O'er heaven's clear azure spreads her sacred light.
When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,
And not a cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene.
——The conscious swains, rejoicing in the sight,
Eye the blue vaults and bless the useful light.

Still more beautiful when her path is through dark masses or patches of clouds—

The moon,
Rising in clouded majesty, at length,
Apparent queen! unveil'd her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.

Still more so, perhaps, in her virgin crescent. So the Church of Christ, faithfully reflecting to a world still in darkness the light she receives from the Sun of Righteousness, an object of beauty to men and angels. All the more beautiful when her path is through dark clouds of trial and adversity—her usual course in this world. The proper character of believers to be 'fair' in their doings, dealings, and general demeanour. To cultivate and exhibit 'whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report.' The Church's fair face to be soiled with tears, but not with sin. Her character after Pentecost (Acts ii. 42—47; Heb. x. 32—34).

2. '*Clear as the sun.*' The Church's path progressive. A refulgence belonging to the sun above that of the moon. The New Testament Church clothed with the sun, while the moon is under her feet (Rev. xii. 1). The Lord Himself, the Sun of Righteousness, her everlasting light. Believers partakers of His glory. Even now the prayer of Deborah in part fulfilled: 'Let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might' (Jud. v. 31). Fully hereafter. 'The righteoun shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father' (Matt. xiii. 43). We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory (1 John iii. 2; Col. iii. 4). Believers to be clear in their character, their conscience, and their creed. Christ's Church to be like Cesar's wife—above suspicion.

3. '*Terrible as an army with banners.*' The comparison to a bannered host already made. The allusion here not unlikely to the *celestial* host, the stars, as they appear marshalled in the midnight sky, when 'He bringeth out their host by number.' The third comparison probably taken from the same class of objects as the first and second. The stars, as seen in Syria, especially resplendent. Something overpowering and awe-inspiring in the countless starry worlds, varying in magnitude, brilliancy, and colour, as they throng the deep blue vault of heaven. The Church not only fair and clear but terrible; and terrible as she is fair and clear. Attractive yet terrible. Burning yet unconsumed. The Church's faithful ministers especially, as stars in the Saviour's right hand. They that turn many to righteousness to shine as the stars for ever and ever (Dan. xii. 3). The whole regenerate Church to be seen one day by an astonished world as a countless starry host, of which 'one star differeth from another star in glory.' The description of the Church in this verse, and the kindred one in verse fourth, among the most magnificent passages in the Song. The distinction between the two, that the former takes its comparisons from terrestrial, the latter from celestial objects. Perhaps pointing to the [illegible] between the

Church while militant on earth, and the same Church when triumphant in heaven; the former description concluding with the simile of an army marshalled for battle under its banner, the latter with that of glittering stars peacefully shining in the midnighty sky. Conflict first, then rest. First the fight, then the feast.

"There they who with their Leader,
Have conquer'd in the fight,
For ever and for ever,
Shall shine as stars of light."

PART FIFTH.

Married Life and its Incidents.

Chapter VI. 6, 10—8, 14.

Scene First. Place: *The Royal Palace.* **Speakers:** *Solomon and Shulamite.*

The King's Happiness in his Bride.

Verses 11, 12.

Solomon.

I went down to the garden of nuts,
To see the fruits of the valley;
To see whether the vine flourished
And the pomegranate budded.
Or ever I was aware,
My soul made me like the chariots of
Amminadib.

The concluding part of the Song appears to exhibit the mutual happiness enjoyed by the married pair. In the words before us the King apparently presented as expressing the joy he experienced in the possession and society of his Bride Exhibits, spiritually, the delight which the Lord Jesus finds in His Church as the Bride whom He has betrothed and united to Himself. Husbands taught to love their wives from the example of Christ in His love to His blood-bought Church (Eph. v. 25).

The present section given in the form of narrative. As the Bride in the preceding part of the Song related her experience, so in this the Bridegroom appears to relate his. 'I went down,' &c. Not clear what particular incident is referred to, whether connected with the King's first acquaintance with Shulamite, or his withdrawal, as related by the Bride, or a visit to the Bride in her own apartment at a time subsequent to the marriage. The last the most probable. The narrative possibly given, like the Bride's, in a song at the Marriage Feast. In seeking spiritual profit from the passage, may we receive 'the mind that hath wisdom!' The privilege of believers, in searching the Scriptures, to plough with the Spirit's heifer. (Jud. xiv. 18). Observe in regard to—

The King's Visit.

I. *The* Place *of the visit.* 'I went down to the garden of nuts.' The walnut probably intended. Fruit with a bitter husk, hard shell, and sweet kernel. Formerly common and luxuriant around the lake of Genesaret. Probably the 'garden' to be here viewed, as in chap. vi. 16 and vi. 2, as a figurative expression for the Bride. Now a 'garden' of nuts, as indicating a state of maturity, or the Bride as a married wife. Perhaps exhibits 'the Bride's graces ripened by her earnest search after Jesus.' The privilege of believers to attain to a maturity in grace. 'Be no more children.' 'Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age.' (Heb. v. 12—14; Eph. iv. 13, 14) The Church of the New Testament thus distinguished, as a whole, from that of the Old Legal Dispensation. So the Millennial Church in relation to the present. 'The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days.' The Church and individual believers a

Garden of Nuts,

as—(1) *The fruit is preserved safe in a hard shell.* The Church in the world, but preserved from its pollution and its injury. 'I, the Lord, do keep it; lest any hurt it, I do keep it night and day.' 'I will be a wall of fire round about her.' 'Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.' 'His truth shall be thy shield and buckler' (Ps. cxi. 4—6; Isa. xxvii. 2). 'I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil' (John xvii. 15). (2) *The kernel hidden within the shell.* Believers God's 'hidden

ones.' Their 'life hid with Christ in God.' 'The world knoweth us not, even as it knew Him not.' 'The Lord knoweth them that that are His.' (3) *The fruit only reached when the shell is broken.* Trouble and affliction often the means of discovering grace. Persecution often the occasion of bringing forth God's hidden ones. (4). *A rough exterior and a bitter husk, but a sweet kernel.* 'God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.' Believers, while in this world, often like their Master. (Isa. liii. 2, 3). 'Judge not according to the appearance.' 'The Lord looketh not on the outward appearance, but upon the heart.' 'If we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified together.' (5) *Nuts composed of shell and kernel: the former however to perish; the latter to be used as food, or to propogate as seed.* Believers while in this world possessed of a twofold nature—the flesh and the spirit; the former, however hard to overcome, to perish at death, or the Lord's appearing; the latter preserved for Christ's enjoyment and service in the new heavens and the new earth. (6). *Nuts require much time for ripening.* Believers ordinarily kept many years in the world for their maturity and perfection in grace. The maturity of the Church as a whole has, in the wisdom of God, required many centuries, and is not yet attained. (7) *Nuts ordinarily the last fruit in the garden.* The Church of Christ to outlive the world, and grace to survive nature. 'The righteous is an everlasting foundation.' The earth and the things therein to be burned up. To be followed by a new earth, 'wherein dwelleth righteousness' (2 Peter iii. 10—13). 'The upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it; but the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it' (Prov. ii. 21, 22).

Observe further in regard to the king's visit to the garden—

1. *Christ seeks pleasure in His Church as a man in his garden.* 'This is my rest for ever, for I have desired it.' The Church named by Himself—Hephzibah,—'My delight is in her.' If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him and he with Me' (Rev. iii. 20).

2. *Unspeakable condescension in Christ's visits to His Church.* 'I went down.' His visits a coming down from the heights of glory to a sinful world The Lord of glory visiting a worm. He humbles Himself even to 'behold the things that are in heaven;' yet comes down to earth to raise up the poor out of the dust, and to lift the needy out of the dung-hill (Ps. cxiii. 6, 7).

3. *Mature believers Christ's especial pleasure.* 'I went down to the garden of nuts.' The promise—'I will dwell in them and walk in them,' connected with the precept—'Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing' (2 Cor. vi. 16, 17). 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy. He will beautify the meek with salvation' (Ps. cxlvii. 11; cxlix. 4, xxxvii. 23).

II. *The* OBJECT *of the visit.* 'To see the fruits of the valley,' &c. A valley low in situation and generally fertilized by a stream of water; hence suitable for a garden. Christ's Church lowly in her condition in respect to this world. 'Not many mighty,' &c. Lowliness of spirit the proper character of His people. 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.' Christ's Church well watered. 'I will water it every moment.' Sheltered as well as watered. 'The city shall be low in a low place.' Observe—(1) *Christ's delight to see the spiritual fruits of His Church.* 'Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be my disciples.' 'My soul desired the first ripe fruits.' (2) *Christ careful in observing the spiritual condition and progress of His Church.* 'To see whether the vine flourished and the pomegranates budded.' Fruit expected. 'I looked that it should bring forth grapes.' 'These three years I come seeking fruit.' The first declaration in each of Christ's letters to the Seven Churches: 'I know Thy works.' This followed by a description of their condition. The spiritual condition of congregations and individual believers carefully noted. Growth and progress looked for. The Church and the believer's soul to be like Aaron's rod that 'budded, and blossomed, and bare almonds.' (3) *Grace found in different stages*—the bud, the blossom, and the fruit. 'First the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear.' The 'bud' precious in Christ's eyes as well as the fruit. 'Feed my lambs,' His first charge to Peter. The day of small things not despised. (4) *Different kinds of fruit in Christ's garden.* Nuts, grapes, and pomegranates. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Passive as well as active virtues. The child's docility, the maiden's purity, the confessor's boldness, and the martyr's patience. (5) *Different characteristics and types among believers. Nut-trees, vines, and pomegranates,* 'Sons of consolation' and 'sons of thunder.' Varieties found in the Church which are due not to the degree of grace, but to the natural character. Constitutional differences of individual character not extinguished or suppressed by

grace, but hallowed and employed for different purposes in the Kingdom of God. Marthas as well as Marys, Jameses as well as Johns required in the Church of Christ.

III. *The* RESULT *of the visit.* 'Or ever I was aware,' &c. Apparently expressive of speedy, sudden, and unexpected delight. The king's expectation quickly, suddenly, and more than gratified. Christ's desire for fruit and enjoyment in His blood-bought Church fully and speedily realized on and after the Day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 1, 2, 41—47; iv. 31—37; v. 12, 14, 41, 42). The glorious change wrought on the New Testament Church the immediate result of the outpoured Spirit who, ten days after Christ's ascension, came suddenly as a 'mighty rushing wind' that 'filled all the house where they were sitting.' The 'chariots of Amminadib' probably distinguished for the speed at which they were driven. 'Amminadib' possibly the name of a well-known charioteer. The meaning of the name—My willing, liberal, noble, or princely people. May point to the love and devotedness of the Pentecostal Church, when none of them said 'that ought of the things which he professed was his own;' and when, in the ardour of their love to one another, and their consecration to the Saviour's cause, they 'sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need' (Acts ii. 45; iv. 32). A fulfilment of the text also possibly in the boldness and zeal of the Apostles and primitive Church, in testifying for Christ and preaching His Gospel in the world according to His last and great commission: 'Go ye unto all the world,' &c. From the text we may observe—

1. *Christ's affections moved by the contemplation of His people's graces.* More especially—(1) Their earnestness in seeking Him when absent, as Shulamite had previously sought her absent Bridegroom. (2) Their penitence for past indifference and unfaithfulness. (3) Their love in commending Him to others. (4) Their zeal in carrying out His wishes in regard to the world. Christ's joy for a time at least fulfilled in the New Testament Church, in their love to one another, their obedience to His word, and their devotedness to His service. Christ glorified in His saints. Moved with an intensity of feeling towards His people. 'As the Bridegroom rejoiceth over the Bride, so will the Lord thy God rejoice over thee' (Isa. lxii. 5). His joy over them in proportion as they show themselves His 'willing people.' This their proper character (Ps. cx. 3; 2 Cor. viii. 5).

2. *Christ's people to be His chariot in conveying the Gospel, and in winning others to His side.* The Gospel the chariot in which Christ goes forth with His bow in His hand, 'conquering and to conquer' (Rev. vi. 2). His people in general, and preachers in particular, the bearers of that Gospel, both at home and abroad. Hence His 'battle-axe and weapons of war' for breaking in pieces the nations (Jer. li. 20—25).

3. *The cause of Christ's joy in His people from and within Himself.* 'My soul made me like (or simply 'made me') the chariots,' &c. His own 'soul' rather than anything really in *them*. 'The believer has a notable friend in Christ's own bosom.—*Durham*. 'Of Me is thy fruit found.' 'Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit' (John xv. 16).

4. *The privilege and happiness of Christ's faithful and willing people that they are made His joy.* 'These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full' (John xv. 11).

THE CALL TO SHULAMITE.

Verse 13.

Return, return, O, Shulamite;
Return, return;
That we may look upon thee.

Probably the language of the King, speaking in the plural as in chap. i. 11, perhaps as being attended by companions. Expressive of admiration of Shulamite's beauty, and ardent desire for her presence and society. Shulamite, though entreated to return, supposed to be near enough to answer the call. 'What will ye see in the Shulamite?' Her attempted flight from the King, from whatever cause, supposed in the call. Probably from conscious unworthiness, as indicated in her answer, 'What will ye see?' &c. The reference in the words, and their connection with the preceding, obscure. Clearer on the supposition of the king relating his first meeting with his future Bride. Perhaps the allusion to the Bride's own narrative. The spiritual application of the words little affected by the obscurity of the reference. The allegorical meaning, the principal matter, sufficiently obvious. Similar language too frequently addressed through the prophets by the heavenly Bridegroom to His ancient Church. The text in harmony with such passages as Jer. iii. 1, 12—14, 20—22; iv. 1; v. 23; xxxi. 22. Hos. xii. 6; xiv. 1. Joel ii. 13; Zech. i. 3. May be viewed therefore as a prophetic intimation—(1) of Israel's departure from the Lord in the time of the kings, as well as in that of the Saviour;

and of the earnestness with which the Lord, first by His prophets, then by Himself personally in the flesh, and subsequently by His Apostles and servants, sought to bring back His backslidden people. The Gospel to be first preached in Jerusalem and to the Jewish nation. Christ's personal call and that of His forerunner: 'Repent.' 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings!' The Apostles' call to the same people: 'Repent and be converted.' (2) Of the same tendency in the New Testament Church. A similiar call on the part of the Bridegroom heard in most of the Epistles to the Seven Churches. Because iniquity should abound, the love of many should wax cold. The caution as necessary for the New Testament Church as for the Old: 'Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.' The Epistle to the Hebrews written especially to guard the Hebrew Christians from backsliding and apostacy. Paul's Epistle to the Churches of Galatia indicative of a similar danger: 'O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?' 'Be not again entangled in the yoke of bondage.' 'I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel.' 'Ye did run well: who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth.' Practical as well as doctrinal departures even then to be mourned over. 'Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.' Observe in regard to the

Call to Return.

I. *The* PARTY *called.* 'O Shulamite.' Different significations assigned to the name. (1) *Bride of Solomon;* the name viewed as the feminine form of Solomon. The Bride thus named from her husband. So Christ's new name to be written upon His faithful people (Rev. iii. 12). Disciples called 'Christians' or 'Christ's people.' The same name given to both the heavenly Bridegroom and the Bride: 'The Lord our righteousness' (Jer. xxiii. 6; xxxiii. 16). (2) *One who has been reconciled, or has obtained peace.* As Solomon is 'The Peaceful,' or 'The Peace-giver;' so Shulamite, 'The Pacified,' or 'The Peace-receiver.' 'Justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' 'He is our peace,' 'having made peace through the blood of His cross; and you hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death' Rom. v. 1; Eph. ii. 14; Col. i. 20, 22). (3) *The perfect One.* So chap. iv. 7; vi, 9. Israel's beauty said to have been 'perfect' through Jehovah's comeliness put upon her (Ezek. xvi. 14). Believers complete in Christ. Called to be perfect as God is perfect; to be 'perfect and entire, wanting nothing;' to 'stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.' (4) *An inhabitant of Salem or Jerusalem* (Ps. lxxvi. 2). The Bride made such by her union with Solomon. Believers, through union with Christ, made citizens of the new and heavenly Jerusalem—the Jerusalem which is above. Their citizenship in heaven, from whence they look for the Saviour (Phil iii. 19: Heb. xii. 22; Rev. iii. 12; Gal. iv. 23). Jerusalem also literally the birthplace of the New Testament Church, which had its first meetings in that city, and began from thence to publish the glad tidings of salvation and peace to the world (Luke xxiv. 47; Isa. xl. 9). (5) *Equivalent to Shulamite,* or an inhabitant of Shunem, early known as Sulem, and corresponding with the present *Solam,* a village about three miles north of Jezreel. The Bride thus apparently identified with Abishag (1 Kings i. 3), and reminded of her native home and humble origin. Believers not to forget the 'hole of the pit' from whence they were taken, and the dust and dunghill from which rich and sovereign grace stooped to lift them, in order to 'set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory' (1 Sam. ii. 8; Ps. cxiii. 7, 8; Isa. li. 1). The text, viewed as Christ's call to His timid, down-cast and backslidden people, thus given in the greatest tenderness and love, as to those whom He has already espoused to Himself. Reminds them of their abiding union with and interest in Him. Like that to Israel: 'Turn O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married to you' (Jer. iii. 14). The bond that unites Christ's people to Himself indissoluble. 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving kindness have I drawn thee.' 'I will betroth thee unto Me for ever' (Jer. xxxi. 3; Hos. ii. 19).

II. *The* CALL *itself.* 'Return.' The call, as addressed to Shulamite, not merely applicable to Solomon's first meeting with her Her own narrative indicative of its subsequent appropriateness. Man's return to God the aim of all Divine revelation and the economy of redemption. Sin and the fall a departure from God. The first act of our fallen parents symbolical of the moral state into which the fall brought mankind — a fleeing from our Maker. The tendency in man's fallen nature continually to do the same. Man now by nature actually in a state of departure and apostasy from God. The Bible a continuous call to men to return to

Him from whom they have revolted. Christ's redeemed Church naturally in this state of apostasy from God in common with others. The object of Christ to bring her back from her wandering. 'I came not call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' Hence the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Money, and the Prodigal Son. Every converted soul an example of obedience to the call in the text. The Gospel call: 'Turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die?' 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, for He will have mercy upon him.' 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest.' Same proneness to depart from God in the carnal nature still remaining in the believer. Constant tendency to backslide. The tendency too often yielded to. Believers not unfrequently in a backslidden state. The first of the Seven Epistles of the ascended Saviour a reproof for having left 'first love,' and a call to 'repent and do the first works.' The last of them a similar call to 'be zealous and repent.' Cowper's lament too frequently to be made by Christ's Bride: 'Where is the blessedness I knew, when first I saw the Lord?' Believers, like Peter, often requiring a second conversion. As addressed to believers, the call in the text to—(1) The ardour of first love. So the call to the Church at Ephesus (Rev. ii. 4, 5). (2) Renewed zeal in His service. 'Do the first works' (Rev. ii. 5). (3) To a holy and Christlike life. (4) To closeness of walk with God and with Jesus Christ. The nature of sin to cause coolness and distance between the soul and God. (5) To the peace and comfort formerly enjoyed. David's sin cost him broken bones and sleepless nights. The joy of God's salvation lost through backsliding, though the salvation itself is not (Ps. li. 8, 12).

III. *The* MANNER *of the Call.* Indicated in the fourfold repetition of the same word: 'Return.' Intimates—

1. Its *earnestness.* Like the Call in Ezekiel: 'Turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die?' Yet even that double call here repeated. Shows the earnestness of Christ both for the return of a sinner, and of a backslidden believer. 'Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together!' Corresponds with all that He has done and suffered for the salvation of men. So He stands at the door and knocks, as if unwilling to depart.

2. Its *continuousness.* Not once or twice, but four times. 'All day long have I stretched out my hand to a disobedient and gainsaying people.' 'How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?' The patience of God with His backslidden people, and the continuousness of His call to sinners to repent, something wonderful.

3. Its *kindness.* Each successive 'Return' a declaration of His loving heart. One such call to a sinner or backslider a token of love. What when it is repeated four times over?

4. The *difficulty of compliance.* Great the unwillingness to return, or the difficulty of doing so, that requires a four times repeated call to overcome it. Much easier to stray and backslide than to return. Departure from God a downward motion. The return an ascent. Impossible to renew a certain once favoured class to repentance. Yet nothing impossible with God. Christ's fourfold call, entering the ear and heart, the means of overcoming the natural reluctance and fear, as well of a sinner as a backsliding saint. The longer the Prodigal's absence, the more difficult his return.

5. The *seriousness of the case.* No slight cause the occasion of a fourfold call. Awful condition of the soul away from Christ. Mournful, as well as hazardous, state of a backslider. Such a thing as a 'drawing back unto perdition.' Sad loss both to himself and others when a believer keeps at a distance from God.

6. The *duty and necessity of immediate compliance.* When Christ calls earnestly to return, hazardous as well as sinful to sit still. Such a Call to be at once followed by the Prodigal's resolution: 'I will arise and go to my Father.'

IV. *The* OBJECT *of the Call.* 'That we may look upon Thee'—admire and enjoy Thy beauty. The language of the king, either for himself alone, or for others with him. Christ speaks to His people both in His own name and the Father's. 'My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him' (John xiv. 23). The object of the Call to sinners and backsliders, to return that Christ the Father may rejoice in their spiritual beauty as restored, renewed, and saved souls. The pleasure and glory of God necessarily the object of all His dealings with His creatures. 'He hath made all things for Himself.' 'For Thy pleasure they are and were created. So with believers: 'This people have I formed for Myself, that they may show forth My praise' (Isa. iii. 2). Believers chosen by God in Christ to be 'holy and without blame before Him in love' (Eph. i. 4). God's greatest glory and joy in looking on lost sinners restored, renewed, and saved by the obedience of His Son, and the grace of His Spirit. Saved souls the Saviour's reward,

and the subject of His joy (Isa. liii. 10, 11; Luke xv. 5). His love to sinners indicated in the joy He feels in their salvation. His love to His people shown in the pleasure He has in their spirituality, beauty, and prosperity. His joy especially in beholding them returning from their wanderings, and giving up all for His sake. His delight in their beauty an argument for their entire consecration. 'Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty' (Ps. xlv. 10, 11). The sinner exhorted to return for his own sake; the saint for his Saviour's. Yet a powerful argument with the sinner that God has pleasure in his salvation, not in his destruction. 'Turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die? I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn unto Me and live' (Ezek. xviii. 18, 23; xxxiii. 11). An irresistible motive in the hands of the Spirit both with the sinner and the saint, that a Three-One God is glorified and rejoices in his return.

Shulamite's Diffidence.

Verse 13.

What will ye see in the Shulamite?

The question the reply to the Call. Shulamite little conscious of any such beauty and attractiveness. Acknowledges herself Solomon's wife; or perhaps confesses to her humble origin. 'What am I, and what is my father's house?' So Gideon when called to be Israel's deliverer: 'My family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house' (Jud. vi. 14, 15). One effort of grace to make us conscious of our unworthiness. Moses, on coming down from the Mount, wist not that his face shone. Isaiah in the Temple: 'I am a man of unclean lips.' Peter in the presence of a divine Saviour: 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' Job: 'Now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' The more light, the more defects seen. Company with Christ discovers our shortcomings. Formerly, before the marriage, Shulamite defended her beauty before the daughters of Jerusalem. After being for a little with her Beloved, she hangs her head: 'I am but a common wildflower of the plain—a lily of the valley.' Now, as the King's married wife: 'What will ye see in the Shulamite?' So Paul, righteous in his own eyes before he had seen the Lord; then, 'less than the least of all saints;' last of all, 'the chief of sinners.' Sight of Christ shows us our own deformity. John Wesley's dying testimony: 'I the chief of sinners am; But Jesus died for me.' That of William Wilberforce: 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' Humility, in God's estimation the greatest beauty. 'To that man will I look who is humble.' The great Exemplar meek and lowly in heart. Humility the first lesson He teaches. The 'poor in spirit' the heirs of the kingdom. Humility to be the believer's clothing. A believer puts on humility as he puts on Christ. The believer's twofold testimony: 'I am nothing; Christ is all.' The glow-worm hides itself in the light which clothes it. The question of the Shulamite that of Peter and John after Pentecost: 'Why look ye so earnestly upon us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?' (Acts iii. 12).

Yet, notwithstanding unworthiness, believers still Christ's spouse. That relation to Christ to be maintained in the face of all shortcomings. Believers not to deny the grace of God in them and towards them. Sense of sin and unworthiness quite compatible with consciousness of acceptance in the Beloved and the joy of faith.

The King's Answer.

Verse 13.

As it were the company of two armies.

The King's answer intended to dispel the diffidence of the Bride. Expressive of her grace and attractiveness in his sight. The 'company' properly a 'dance,' or a 'company of dancers.' Dances anciently a part of religious worship. Especially practised in connection with religious festivals, the celebration of victories, and other solemn and festive occasions. Performed by several companies at once, and by ranks moving in opposite directions. Always an expression of joy, whether in God or otherwise (Exod. xv. 20, 21; xxxii. 19; Judges xxi. 19, 1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7; Jer. xxxi. 4, 13; Ps. cxlix. 3, doubtful; Luke xv. 25; Matt. xi. 11, 17). Religious dances still common in the East. Their introduction into the West an idea of Savanarola. The 'armies, or camps' either literally armies of men who, in celebration of a victory, engaged in such dances; or the angelic hosts; the word here used being the name given by Jacob to the place where the angels of God met him: Mahanaim, or, as in margin, 'Two hosts or camps' (Gen xxxii. 12). The dual form of the word, though not necessarily implying two, perhaps indicating two divisions or semi-choruses, as of the women of Israel (1 Sam. xviii. 7), or, of the Levites at the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. xii. 12, 31,

38, 40), the companies of Levites being also called 'camps' (1 Chron. ix 18, 19). The comparison expressive of—

1. *Grace and beauty.* The Bride from her beauty already compared to an army with banners, whether as marshalled for battle, on the march, or under review. The beauty, perhaps, still greater of military companies engaged in a martial or festive dance, or in performing their orderly evolutions. Even this much short of the beauty of a company, or, rather of two responsive bands of angels engaged in holy dance, as expressive of their joy and praise. Such the beauty and grace of the Bride in the eyes of her Beloved. Such the beauty of the Church in the eyes of Christ amid all her blemishes and defects. The mind of Christ Himself expressed by the Apostle when he wrote to the Church at Colosse: 'Joying and beholding your order.' What the beauty of the Church when she shall be presented to her Bridegroom, 'a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing?' Beautiful and glorious indeed when the Lord of glory Himself shall, on the day of His glorious appearing, 'be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe' (2 Thess. i. 10). 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' Our vile bodies changed and 'fashioned like His own glorious body.'

2. *Grandeur and terribleness.* The Bride already said to be 'terrible as an army with banners.' Something in great personal beauty that awes while it charms you. 'Terror in beauty.' So with spiritual beauty. 'He perceived how awful goodness is.' So with the Church after Pentecost. 'Of the rest durst no man join himself to them; but the people magnified them' (Acts ii. 13). All that sat in the Council looking steadfastly at Stephen, 'saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.' A beauty in Christian meekness and patience that awes even persecutors.

3. *Joy and adoration.* The comparison, whether referring to things celestial or terrestrial, suggestive of joy and praise. The dance, like music in general, expressive of festive joy, and, like sacred song, employed, as already noticed, in connection with divine worship (Jud. xi. 34; xxi. 21). God to be worshipped with holy gladness. Joy especially becoming in the service and worship of Him who is love itself and the fountain of every blessing. 'O come let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.' 'Make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.' 'Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp and the voice of a Psalm; with trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord the King.' 'Serve the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing.' 'Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and organs' (Ps xcv. 1; xcviii. 4—6; c. 2, ; cl. 4). To rejoice in the Lord a repeatedly enjoined duty. That joy, however, far removed from levity and carnal mirth. Mingled with reverence and godly fear. A holy awe in the true worship of God, which deepens instead of damping the joy. Joy, as well as love and peace, a fruit of the Spirit, (Gal. v. 22). Joy in divine worship probably only hindered by the corruption of the heart and its coldness in respect to God, from expressing itself, at certain times, in dance as well as song. The beauty and attractiveness of grace heightened by the deep and holy joy which it produces.

4. *Boldness and courage.* A characteristic of 'armies,' whether human or angelic. Holy courage a grace of the Spirit. 'Add to your faith virtue,' or courage. Believers called to quit themselves like men, and be strong. The fearful classed with the unbelieving. Courage the child of faith. By faith men 'out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, put to flight the armies of the aliens.' Verified in the Primitive Church, and in times of persecution. The noble army of martyrs. 'They loved not their lives unto the death.' True courage, to fear God and have no other fear. Such courage a part of the Christian character. The Church while on earth necessarily militant. The believer's adversaries the world, the flesh, and the devil. Carries in himself two contending armies, the flesh and the spirit (Rom. vii. 23; Gal. v. 17; 1 Pet. ii. 7). The life of a believer a warfare, but a blessed one (1 Tim. i. 18; vi. 12; 2 Tim. iv. 7). The Church enlisted under Christ as 'the sacramental host of God's elect,' to do battle against its spiritual foes. Not less beautiful in the Bridegroom's eyes because returning, like himself, with scars and wounds. A penitent and believing soul courageously fighting in the Saviour's strength, against sin, Satan, and an evil world, more beautiful in Christ's eyes than armies of Seraphim (Luke xv. 6, 7, 10).

The whole redeemed Church of Christ known as two armies — the Church militant on earth, and the Church triumphant in heaven. With the latter the battle is fought, and the victory won; with the former, the fight still continues, but the victory certain. In the eye of the glorious Leader, both but 'one army of the living God.' The day at hand when they shall be visibly one, as 'the armies which are in heaven,' following their victorious Commander, who, as the Rider on the White Horse, 'with righteousness doth judge and make war' (Rev. xix. 11—14).

SHULAMITE'S BEAUTY CONTEMPLATED AND ADMIRED.

Chap. vii. Verse 1—7.

How beautiful are thy feet with shoes,
O Prince's daughter!
The joints of thy thighs are like jewels,
The work of the hands of a cunning workman.
Thy navel is like a round goblet,
That wanteth not liquor.
Thy belly is like a heap of wheat,
Set about with lilies.
Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins.
Thy neck is as a tower of ivory.
Thine eyes like the fishpools in Heshbon,
By the gate of Bathrabbim.
Thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon,
That looketh towards Damascus.
Thy head upon thee is like Carmel,
And the hair of thy head like purple;
The King is held in the galleries.
How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!
This thy stature is like to a palm tree,
And thy breasts to clusters of grapes.

Shulamite, encouraged by his gracious call, now appears in the presence of the King. The King, probably accompanied by his female attendants, contemplates and admires with them her sweetness and beauty. The eye surveys her whole figure, including her ornaments and attire, which, as in the case of the shoes, can alone meet the view. These latter, however, admired and mentioned as tending to set off her beauty.

The title here given to Shulamite observable—'Prince's daughter.' Probably not so originally, but—(1) Through union with Solomon. (2) As worthy to be such—her beauty, dignity and grace, such as to become a prince's daughter, while her spirit and disposition were such as to suggest a royal extraction. The Church of Christ, and believers individually, fitly so called, as—(1) Born of God, the King eternal (John i. 12; 2 Cor. vi. 18; 1 John iii. 1). (2). United to Christ, the 'Prince of the Kings of the earth,' as His Bride (Rev. xix. 7; xxi. 9). (3) Princely in their rank and possessions—kings and priests unto God, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, to inherit all things (Rev. i. 6; xxi. 7; Rom. viii. 17). (4). Endowed with a princely spirit, disposition, and bearing (Is. xxxii. 5—8; Ps. xxxvii. 21; 2 Sam. xxiv. 22, 23; 2 Cor. viii 1—4). Believers raised by sovereign grace as beggars from the dung-hill to sit with princes, and to inherit the throne of glory (1 Sam. ii. 8; Ps. cxiii. 7).

In the contemplation of Shulamite by the the king and his attendants, and in the description of her loveliness and grace, her 'feet,' or rather *steps*, and the 'shoes' she wore, the first object noticed. Perhaps the attention first struck by her graceful and becoming gait as she 'returned' and approached the king. The shoes of Oriental females of rank always beautifully and richly ornamented. The feet thus adorned indicative of a princely condition. The 'feet,' or steps, suggestive of the believer's walk and daily life. Practical holiness and devotion to the Lord's service a great part of spiritual beauty. This especially noticed by the Lord Jesus. 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' Indolence and sloth no part of a believer's character. The 'shoes' of the believer the 'preparation' given him by 'the Gospel of peace,' for holy active service or patient enduring of the Master's will. The feet to be 'beautiful with shoes,' in imitating the Bridegroom who 'went about doing good,' and, according to ability, publishing the glad tidings of peace (Is. lii. 7; Rom. x. 15). Carrying the tidings of salvation to a perishing world, the work peculiarly committed to the Bride of Christ, and that in which great part of her beauty is seen. The distinction of the Pentecostal Church—they 'went every where preaching the Lord Jesus' (Acts viii. 4; xi. 19, 20; 2 John vii.). The New Testament Church to be not merely evangelical, but evangelistic. Called not merely to *hold*, but to *hold forth* the Word of Life (Phil. ii. 16). Her beauty not merely in holy walking, but in lowly working. The Church essentially a missionary institution, established by her Lord before He went up to heaven, and fitted for her work by the promised gift of the Holy Ghost (Matt. xxviii. 20; Luke xxiv. 46—49).

The order in the former descriptions of the Bride's beauty here reversed. Commencing with the 'feet,' advances upwards. Perhaps the Church here especially exhibited as seen by *men*. The world can see the believer's walk and judge of that. Men mark how 'the Christian *lives*. His *inward* life 'hid with Christ in God.' The outward *walk* suggested also by the next object mentioned in the description. 'The joints (or roundings) of thy thighs are like jewels,' &c. The gait as well as appearance of the Bride's figure still probably in view. The comparison to 'jewels' perhaps suggested by the eye falling on the Bride's jewelled girdle. The descrip-

tion, as expressive of the life of the New Testament Church, verified in Acts ii. 42—47; iv. 32—37; Heb. x. 32—36. That life the production of a Divine workman (Eph. ii. 10; Gal. v. 22). The Divine life of believers the result of the renewing of the Holy Ghost (Tit. iii. 5).

In the description of this and the parts next named, as in the case of the *feet*, the dress that clothed them only visible, and the subjects only of the comparisons, namely: 'the navel' or girdle-clasp which covered it, and the belly or body with the breasts, described by the light coloured dress of golden tissue embroidered wth white flowers—the 'garments of wrought gold' and the 'raiment of needlework' worn by the Bride (Ps. xlv. 13, 14). The comparisons, like the mention of the parts themselves, more according to the style of Oriental than of modern European poetry. The parts now mentioned more especially connected with maternity, always highly esteemed in the East; and the comparisons chosen accordingly. The navel, or girdle-clasp, compared to a round goblet, replenished with wine; the breasts to two young beautiful gazelles — the emblems of love and beauty (Prov. v. 19); and the body, or the robe which clothed it, to a heap of wheat surrounded, as is said to have been the custom at a harvest festivity, with lilies or other flowers. The Church, like Shulamite, to be 'not only a beautiful Bride, but a fruitful mother.' The New Testament or Gentile Church, the 'barren woman made to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children' (Ps. cxiii. 9). To the free Jerusalem, which is above, and which is the mother of all believers, the Prophet, followed by the Apostle, cries: 'Rejoice, O barren, thou that didst not bear; for more are the children of the desolate than of her which hath an husband' (Isa. liv. 1: Gal. iv. 26, 27). That Church represented by such as Paul himself, when he says: 'My little children, of whom I travail in birth again, until Christ be formed in you.' 'We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children' (Gal. iv. 19; 1 Thess. ii. 7). The bodily parts, and the comparisons in the text, suggestive of a mother, not only bearing, but nourishing, her children. The goblet of wine, the lily-girdled heap of wheat, and the two fawn-like breasts, not unsuitable emblems of the nourishment which the Church, as a spiritual mother, extends to her children in the word and sacraments: the cup of blessing which she blesses, the bread which she breaks, and the pure milk of the Word, which she administers. A 'heap of wheat set about with lilies,' a suggestive emblem of what should be the character of

Ministerial Discourses.

1. *A 'heap of wheat.'* Solid spiritual food, consisting of pure Scripture truth, the food God feeds His people with. 'I should have fed thee with the finest of the wheat' (Ps. lxxxi. 16). The spiritual 'corn,' which, under the New Testament, should 'make the young men cheerful' (Zech. ix. 17). The 'truth as it is in Jesus' the 'bread that strengtheneth man's heart,' and makes it glad. 'Thy words were found unto me, and I did eat them; and Thy word was the joy and rejoicing of my heart.' The Word of God that by which the 'young men' are made strong, and are enabled to 'overcome the wicked One' (1 John ii. 14). That 'wheat' Christ Himself in His person, offices, and work. Christ the 'grain of wheat' which, falling into the ground and dying, brings forth much fruit (John xii. 24). The bread of life which came down from heaven, 'of which if a man eat he shall live for ever.' A discourse to feed the souls of the hearers, to be, not merely *truth*, but 'the truth as it is in Jesus.' To be a heap of *wheat*. Therefore to be well winnowed. The chaff of mere human fancies, speculations, or traditions, to be carefully excluded. 'What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces' (Jer. xxiii. 28, 29). The most useful discourses those that have most of Bible truth in Bible language. No words, for power and efficacy, 'like the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth' (1 Cor. 2, 13). Discourses not only to have the truth, but to have it in *abundance*. Not a handful, but a *heap* of wheat. Ministers to preach a full Christ—a Christ who is both Prophet, Priest, and King. Discourses to contain both doctrine, promise, and precept; the things to be believed, and the things to be done; the things done on God's side, and the things to be done on ours. A fulness in Christ and the truth concerning Him that is inexhaustible. Discourses also to exhibit the truth in a connected, orderly, and methodical manner. A *heap* of wheat—compact and orderly, not mere loose and scattered grains. Divine evangelical truth a compact whole, with order, connection, and mutual dependence in its parts. Both law and Gospel, doctrine and duty, to have their proper place and proportion. Christ taught the people as they were able to hear it. The foundation to be laid in first principles, and so 'to go on to perfection' or higher truths (Heb. v. 11—14; vi. 1). A natural and orderly arrangement in a discourse necessary as well to its retention as its apprehension.

2. *'Set about with lilies.'* The heap of

wheat surrounded with lilies in the way of ornament. The heap thus made more attractive. 'Apples of gold' to be served up in baskets of silver (Prov. xxv. 11.) The wise preacher to 'find out *acceptable* words,' while 'words of truth.' Faithful discourses not necessarily devoid of ornament. Solidity in the matter to be connected with sweetness in the manner of delivering it. The 'heap of wheat' beautified and commended by the 'lilies' that surrounded it. Style as well as staple to be attended to. The lilies not to be eaten with the wheat, yet not therefore without their purpose. The wheat of solid and saving truth advantageously set forth with the lilies of metaphor and simile. Such lilies culled from the fields of God's works as well as God's Word. Gathered also from the words and works of men. Truth both commended and conveyed by apt illustration. Comparisons and illustrations often the window that admits the light. Illustrations drawn from all quarters—history, science, biography, external nature, common life. The discourses of the great Teacher full of them. The better able the preacher is to introduce them, the more likely he is to be useful. Yet the 'lilies' only to *surround* the wheat. To be 'set about' the heap, not mixed up with it. Truth, not metaphor or simile to be the staple. The garnishing not to be confounded with the food with which it is served. 'Very fine, sir, very fine; but people cannot live upon flowers.'—*Robert Hall.* The truth to be the prominent and commanding object. Illustration and ornament to be only so far employed as may render the truth more attractive and effective. 'Lilies' not to take the place of the 'wheat.'

The neck, eyes, and nose of the Bride next commended. The neck for its whiteness and erectness compared to a 'tower of ivory.' The eyes for their largeness and lustre, softness and serenity, compared to the two ponds in Heshbon, the Amorite capital, situated on each side of the gate of Bathrabbim. The nose, for its prominence and majesty, compared to 'the tower of Lebanon that looketh towards Damascus,' the active enemy of Israel, that had been taken by David, but recovered its liberty under Solomon (2 Sam. viii. 6; 1 Kings xi. 23—25). Without straining the allegory and the comparisons, we may view this part of the description as suggestive in relation to the New Testament Church of—

1. *The believer's purity of life and liberty of spirit*, as indicated by Shulamite's fair and erect 'neck' rising like a 'tower of ivory.' White unspotted ivory, a fit emblem of the life of one whom the grace of God teaches 'to deny Himself to all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world' (Tit. ii. 11, 12). A neck like an ivory tower sufficiently suggestive of that 'liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free'—a liberty from the yoke of bondage both in regard to sin and self-righteousness—a liberty not abused as a cloak of maliciousness, but proving itself by a self-denying love.

2. The believer's *calmness, intelligence, and heavenly-mindedness*, in the presence of a noisy, anxious, and bustling world; as symbolized by Shulamite's soft bright eyes, suggesting the placid pool, with its smooth, deep, transparent waters, reflecting the heavens and heavenly bodies on their unruffled bosom, on each side of the principal gate of Heshbon, with its hum of court and market, and its constant tramp of passengers. Believers taught of God not to be 'conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of their mind'; to 'look not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at those which are unseen and eternal'; to be 'without carefulness,' and to have their 'conversation in heaven'; to learn of Him who was 'meek and lowly in heart,' and to be, at once, 'wise as serpents and harmless as doves.'

3. *The believer's boldness, vigilance, and decision*, in the presence of a world that either persecutes or ensnares, and of the great adversary that goes about 'like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.' Symbolized by a 'nose' that suggested the tower of Lebanon, boldly confronting and keeping a vigilant watch upon the hostile city of Damascus. So the Council at Jerusalem marvelled at the boldness of Peter and John in their presence. Believers taught to watch and be steadfast in the faith; to be strong and to quit themselves like men; to be sober and vigilant, and not ignorant of Satan's devices; to obey God rather than men, and to 'esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.'

The description ends with the head, as it began with the feet. 'Thine head upon thee is like Carmel,' &c. Shulamite had commended her Beloved's head as 'being like the most fine gold.' Hers, perhaps still wearing the marriage chaplet, now commended in turn, as resembling the majestic Carmel, towering up from the sea and the plain, and crowned with foliage and flowers. Her hair admired as resembling the richest purple, as well from its lustre as its deep, dark colour. Her Carmel-like head suggestive of the dignity of Christ's Church, and the authority with which He invested her when He said: 'Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in

heaven. Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted, and whosesoever sins ye retain they are retained.' The power of Christ exercised in His Church when acting in His name; and an authority given unto her by Him for edification, but not for destruction (1 Cor. v. 3—5; 2 Cor. x. 8; xiii. 10). The 'hair,' given to the woman for a covering, and serving as her ornament and glory (1 Cor. xi. 15), suggestive of the precious fruits of the Spirit proceeding from Christ, and forming the true adornment of His Church—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, &c., the 'fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise of God' (Gal. v. 22; Phil. i. 11). The believer's adorning not 'the plaiting of the hair, or the wearing of gold, or the putting on of apparel; but that of the hidden man of the heart, which is not corruptible, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit' (1 Peter iii. 4).

The last clause in verse fifth apparently a parenthesis, expressing the admiration of the observer and the attractive power of Shulamite's beauty. 'The (or a) king is held [bound or captive] in the galleries' (or 'by the tresses'). No higher commendation of her charms than that a King—and such a King as Solomon!—was held captive by them. Suggestive of the spiritual beauty put upon the believer, in contemplating which the King of kings finds His delight. 'Forget thine own people and thy father's house, so shall the King desire thy beauty' (Ps. xlv. 10, 11). 'He shall rejoice over thee with joy; He shall rest in His love.' That beauty as great as a Three-One God can put upon a creature in order to fit that creature for a Bride to the incarnate Son, 'who loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water through the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing' (Eph. v. 28). The clause equally expressive of the love of Christ, as of the Church's beauty which He imparts to her. Infinite condescension and love on the part of Him who 'humbleth Himself to behold the things that are done in heaven,' that He is held bound, not by the beauty and dazzling glory of the Seraphim that never sinned, but by the imparted beauty of those whom He raised from the dunghill of degradation and sin, 'to set them among princes, even the princes of His people' (Ps. cxiii. 5). Wonderful power of the believing sinner over the loving Saviour. 'Drawn by His Church's prayers, He is held by the Church's praises.'

The contemplation of Shulamite's beauty followed by an exclamation of admiration and delight. 'How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for (or in) delights!' The character of 'fair and pleasant' already ascribed by Shulamite to her Beloved (chap. i. 16). This twofold character now applied by the King to herself. A mutual admiration and delight between Christ and His people. What He is in their eyes they are in His. Christ not only 'fair' in Himself,' but 'pleasant' to His people. Believers not only made 'fair' in themselves, but 'pleasant' to Christ, Exhibited still further in the expression 'for (or in) delights.' An amazing fact, and expressive of inconceivable grace on the part of Christ,—that the Son of God and Lord of glory can and does find delight in His blood-bought Church, consisting of sinners raised from the dust and dunghill of spiritual filthiness and corruption. Yet such the case: 'The King shall greatly desire thy beauty.' 'He shall rejoice over thee with joy: He shall rest in His love; He shall joy over thee with singing.' 'Thou shalt be called Hephzibah, for the Lord delighteth in thee. As a bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy Lord rejoice over thee' (Isa. lxii. 4, 5; Zeph. iii. 17; Ps. xlv. 11). That delight in His saved people as—(1) Made what they are by the Holy Spirit's grace, conformed to Christ's own image; (2) His own Bride, the gift of His Father, and espoused by Himself; (3) His *redeemed* Bride, for whom He has paid the price of His own humiliation, agony, shame, blood, and death. His delight in them *now*, in the midst of all their imperfections; what when they shall be presented to Himself hereafter, 'a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing?' Hence the duty of believers: (1) To aim at perfect holiness. The holier a believer is, the greater is Christ's delight in him. (2) To be much in fellowship with Jesus. That fellowship the Saviour's joy. (3) To seek the conversion of others. Every converted soul an addition to the Bridegroom's delight. The Bride composed of such souls. (4) To endeavour to promote the sanctification of believers. Christ's joy enhanced as their sanctification advances. An increase in their holiness is an increase in His joy.

As if unable sufficiently to admire the grace and beauty of his Bride, the king resumes his description with the comparison of her whole figure to a noble and beautiful palm tree, with its rich clusters of dates and its evergreen and elegant branches. This thy stature is like a palm tree, and thy breasts like clusters of grapes' (or rather 'dates'). The palm one of the most beautiful of trees. From its erectness and the general beauty of its aspect, its Hebrew name (Thamar, often given to women (Gen. xxxviii. 6;

2 Sam. xiii. 1; xiv. 27). The figure of a palm tree frequent in the decoration of Solomon's temple. At one time abundant in Palestine, and chosen as the emblem of the country. Now rarely to be met with. Judah sits desolate under her solitary palm tree. The palm tree, both from its beauty, its fruitfulness, and its character as an evergreen, an emblem of the righteous (Ps. xcii. 12). The comparison of Shulamite's stature to a palm tree natural; the Bride being regarded—(1) As a tall and elegant female. (2) As the Church of Christ consisting of those who are both justified and sanctified in Christ Himself. Points suggested in the comparison of the Church and the individual believer to a

Palm Tree.

1. Its *erectness*. The palm straight and upright. Believers upright in their principles and conduct. Straightforward, as opposed to the wicked, whose ways are 'crooked' (Ps. cxxv. 5; Prov. ii. 15). Free and joyous, as distinguished from the spirit of bondage and fear that causes the back to be 'bowed down alway' (Ps. lxix. 23; Rom. xi. 10).

2. Its *regularity*. The palm regular in its growth and figure, both in respect to stem and branches. The Apostle's joy in beholding the Church's order. The believer's behaviour orderly. His spiritual growth regular. His piety to be symmetrical. Attention to be given to *all* the will of God, and to all the pattern shown in Christ himself.

3. Its *fruitfulness*. The fruit of the palm tree both abundant and nutritious, growing in very large clusters near the stem. Believers, united to Christ as the Life, bear in greater or less abundance the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, &c. To be filled with the fruits of righteousness. To abound in every good word and work. Their fruit glorifying to God and profitable to men. Continues to be borne at all times and in all circumstances, even unto old age (Ps. xcii. 13, 14).

4. Its *perpetual greenness*. The palm an evergreen. Always crowned with beautiful green feathery branches. True grace an evergreen. Inward spiritual life, which is Christ Himself, abiding. Discovers its beauty and freshness alike in prosperity and adversity; in health and sickness; in youth and old age.

5. Its *elasticity and invincibleness*. The fibre of the palm so elastic that no imposed weights can hinder its upward growth. Hence probably its branches used as tokens of victory and triumph. Nothing able to separate the believer from Christ, who is his life, or to prevent his spiritual growth and final perfection. In all things made more than a conqueror through Him who has loved him. All things made to work together for his spiritual and eternal good. The Church, like its type in Egypt,—'the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew' (Ex. i. 12). The blood of the martyrs the seed of the Church.

6. Its *general beauty*. The palm tree one of the most beautiful objects in the vegetable world. The highest beauty seen in true religion and those exhibiting it. Witnessed in its perfection in the Lord Jesus Christ. Seen, more or less, in all His members who are to be conformed to His image. A loving and consistent Christian the admiration of men.

The breasts of the Bride compared to clusters of dates, the fruit of the palm tree. The comparison natural from the dates growing in large clusters near the stem of the tree. The fruits of the Spirit found in believers sweet and refreshing to Christ. Of these fruits, love, symbolized by the breasts, the first in the inspired list (Gal. v. 22), and the most precious to the Saviour. The love of Mary, as shown by her anointing His feet with costly perfume, the subject of the highest encomium ever passed by the Saviour on any individual act: 'Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. Verily, I say unto you, Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her' (Matt. xxvi. 10—13). A similar act, done from similar feelings by another woman, as the expression of her love to Him who had so graciously forgiven her, rewarded with similar praise (Luke vii. 37—46). No perfume so sweet, and no fruit so precious to the Saviour, as the ardent love of a forgiven sinner.

THE KING'S RESOLUTION AND ANTICIPATION.

Verses 8, 9.

I said, I will go up to the palm tree;
I will take hold of the boughs thereof;
Now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine,
And the smell of thy nose like apples;
And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine,
(For my beloved),
That goeth down sweetly,
Causing the lips of them that are asleep to speak.

'I said,' indicative of the king's purpose,

whether secret or expressed, in regard to Shulamite. The purpose—first, to make her his Bride and then to enjoy her fellowship as such (Prov. v. 18, 19). Christ's doings in regard to His Church the result of a Divine purpose. His delights, prospectively, with the children of men, before the foundation of the world (Prov. viii. 31). His purpose to give Himself for sinners, to unite them to Himself as His Bride, and then throughout eternity to rejoice in their fellowship and love. 'Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with me where I am, that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me' (John xvii. 24). 'He loved the Church and gave Himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water by the Word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church.' 'He gave Himself for us that redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people.' 'This people have I formed for Myself' (Eph. v. 26; Tit. ii. 14; Isa. xliii. 21). Having loved and given Himself for His Church, He will 'rest' and have delight 'in His love' (Zeph. iii. 17). Christ said, I will go up to the palm tree—(1) In the everlasting covenant when He engaged to be the Redeemer of the world. (2) When in the fulness of time He gave Himself for His Church, and 'for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross despising the shame.' (3) When He, according to His loving purpose, arrests the wanderer in his sins, and, as the good shepherd, lays the lost one 'on his shoulders, and returns with it rejoicing.' (4) When from time to time He lovingly manifests Himself to His saved one, comes in and sups with him and he with Him (Rev. iii. 20). (5) When at death He receives the believer to Himself, that where He is he may be also (John xiv. 2). Christ's resolution that of enjoying the fruit of the travail of His soul, and of putting His people also in possession of it. In His love He provided the feast, and with His people He sits down to it. Planted the tree when He ascended the cross, and eats the fruit of it now that He has ascended the throne. The happiness of the believing soul to yield itself to Christ as the palm tree, for His enjoyment of the fruits of it.

Anticipation connected with resolution. 'Now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine,' &c. The loving fellowship of his beloved bride should be sweet and refreshing to him as the clusters of the vine, the fragrance of citrons, and the richest wine. A similar anticipation and desire already expressed on the part of the Bride in reference to her Beloved (chap. ii. 5). A mutual 'comfort of love' between Christ and His people. 'My soul desired the first ripe fruit.' 'I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals.' 'I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness' (Hos. ix. 10; Jer. iii. 2; Mic. vii. 1). This joy experienced by Christ in the first love of the New Testament, as well as that of the Old Testament, Church. His delight found in His people in proportion as He finds in them the graces of His Spirit (Ps. cxlix. 4; Jer. ix. 24). In the finished work of the first creation, God 'rested and was refreshed;' much more in that of the second. The redeemed Church to be to Him 'for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.'—The spiritual breath of the regenerate soul sweet and fragrant to Christ. 'The smell (or fragrance) of thy nose (or breath) like apples (or citrons)'. Such breath the love and longing, the aspirations and expressions, the penitence and gratitude, the confessions and thanksgivings, the sighs and groans, the prayers and praises, of the new and spirit-born nature. 'To this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My word.' 'I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones' (Isa. lvii. 15; lxvi. 2). Marked contrast between the wholesome breath of a living soul and the noxious effluvium of a dead one. The fragrance of a humble and holy love breathed by a believer in proportion as he walks with Christ and posseses His spirit. The love and spiritual-mindedness of a pardoned soul the Saviour's sweetest refreshment. Powerful motive to the cultivation of a holy, loving, and spiritual life.

The loving self-surrender of the Bride apparently indicated in the words, 'for my beloved' (verse 9). Probably the words of the Bride interjected while the Bridegroom was speaking and comparing her love, and the expression of it, to the best wine. The Bride hastens to assure him that that wine should be entirely for himself. He who was so worthy of her love, and who possessed such claims to it, should alone possess it. As his happy and favoured Bride she would love him with an undivided love. The warm and devoted affection of our heart the best gift we can offer; and, through grace, freely given to Him who is most worthy of it, and has the best right to it. That affection desired and prized by Him whom angels delight to honour. Our highest happiness to be permitted and enabled to render it. 'O, what am I, to love such a One, or to be loved by that high and lofty one! I think the angels may blush to look upon Him. Hell (as I now think), and all the pains in

it, laid on me alone, would not put me from loving. Woe, woe is me; I have a lover, Christ, and yet I want love for Him. I have a lovely and desirable Lord, who is love-worthy, and who beggeth my love and heart, and I have nothing to give Him.'—*S. Rutherford.* 'For my Beloved,' the appropriate motto of a loving believer's life. To be inscribed on all we are and have.

Perhaps an intimation, in the conclusion of the verse, of the effects of the believer's love to Christ on others as well as himself. The wine to which the Bride's love, and the expression of it ('the roof of thy mouth') is compared, said, according to our English version, to cause the lips of them that are asleep (*Margin*, 'the ancient') to speak. The language obscure, though indicating *some* property or effect of the wine spoken of, and so of that which is compared to it. Perhaps the reference to its stimulating as well as refreshing virtue. The influence which Christ condescends to allow His people's love to have upon Himself already stated (chap. iv. 9; vi. 5). Its influence on the world, asleep in the snare of Satan and under the power of sin, to be found, indirectly, in the success attending the efforts, prompted by love to Christ and love to souls for His sake, to reclaim the wanderer and rescue the perishing, by conveying to them the glad tidings of His love. Love to Christ the highest and strongest motive impelling believers to self-denying endeavours on behalf of a perishing world. 'Lord, thou knowest that I love Thee,' naturally followed by—'Feed my lambs; feed my sheep.' 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.' Silent lips constantly being opened, from devotedness to Jesus, in the praise of redeeming love.

SHULAMITE'S JOYFUL SELF-SURRENDER.

Verse 10.

I am my beloved's,
And his desire is towards me.

With her love, Shulamite's whole self is given to her Beloved. The heart given, all is given. The Believer's language to Jesus: 'I am thine; save me.' 'They gave themselves first to the Lord, and then to us.' 'The Bride's language—(1) That of *joy*. The believer's surrender of himself to Jesus a *joyful* one. 'O Lord, I am Thy servant, I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds.' 'Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.' The Apostles departed from the Council 'rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame' for the name of Jesus. (2) *Certainty*. No mere hope or supposition. The matter placed beyond a doubt. Satan's object, to lead the believer to question the reality of his surrender of himself to Jesus. Such self-surrender to be made certain by frequent repetition. This the third time Shulamite has made the declaration (Chron. ii. 16; vi. 3). So Peter declared a third time his love to Jesus. A matter of such importance not to be left in doubt. Desirable to be constantly renewing our self-dedication to the Lord. Much of our comfort and growth in grace connected with the assurance that we have truly surrendered ourselves to Jesus, and are His. Observe in regard to such—

Self-Surrender.

I. *Its* OBJECT. (1) For his *sole possession*. One shall say: 'I am the Lord's.' 'Ye are not your own.' (2) For His *pleasure and enjoyment*. 'For Thy pleasure all things are.' Much more the Church whom He has redeemed to Himself. Christ's unspeakable condescension that He finds His enjoyment in His Church. (3) For His *service*. 'I am Thy servant.' Abigail, when consenting to be David's wife, gave herself to be his handmaid to wash the feet of his servants. Mary's language that of the believer: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.' Eve given to Adam to be an 'help meet for him.' Christ's Church at once His Bride and His servants. Our honour to be made 'fellow workers with Him' in the salvation of others. (4) For His *free disposal*. 'Be it unto me according to Thy Word.' 'Let Him do with me as seemeth good in His sight.' 'Not my will, but Thine be done.' Such self-surrender the soul of true religion. 'Religion' a binding ourselves over to the Lord. No man can serve two masters. Every man and woman either for Christ or for His adversary.

II. *Its* CHARACTER. Such surrender—(1) A *willing and cheerful* one. 'The Lord loveth a cheerful giver.' 'Not by constraint, but willingly.' Christ's people willing in the 'day of His power.' (2) A *whole and entire* one. No part kept back. Body, soul, and spirit given up. All we are and all we have. 'Holiness to the Lord' written on the bells of the horse-bridle. Every 'pot' holiness unto the Lord. 'Not a hoof left behind' for the enemy. (3) A *present and eternal* one. Made *now*. Not put off till to-morrow. No deferring till a more convenient season. The surrender required now. Not to make it now is a refusal. Made now, it is made for ever. No taking back the gift. The sacri-

fice bound with the cords of a divine and undying love to the horns of the altar.

III. *The* GROUND *of it.* 'His desire is towards me.' The desire that of a husband to the wife of his choice. Similar language used of Eve in regard to her husband (Gen. iii. 16). A man's wife the desire of his eyes (Ezek. xxiv. 16, 18). The desire of Christ towards a sinner that of a Saviour and a Husband. His desire towards us the ground of ours towards Him. We love Him because He first loved us. 'I am Thy servant; thou hast loosed my bonds.' His desire towards the Church composed of perishing sinners, a desire—(1) To *save and bless* it. 'He loved the Church and gave Himself for it.' His desire towards sinners brought Him from heaven, and then nailed Him to the Cross for their sake. His desire towards His redeemed such that He can withhold no good thing for them. His care and concern for His Church that of a husband for his wife. Bears with her infirmities, sympathizes with her sorrows, protects her from danger, comforts her in trouble, provides for her wants, prepares for her a home. (2) To *possess it as His own.* 'He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people.' His desire, that they may both be 'brought to Him, and kept in Him' (John x. 16; xvii. 11). (3) To *have it with Himself for ever.* Is gone to heaven to prepare a place for them, that where He is, there they may be also. Hence His intercessory prayer: 'Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am' (John xiv. 3; xvii. 24). Rises from His Throne of glory to meet and welcome the liberated spirit of His faithful servant (Acts vii. 55).

Observe the *individuality* of the desire. 'His desire is towards *me*.' Faith's triumph, and the soul's comfort in that little word *me*. Every sinner that accepts of Jesus as a Saviour warranted to employ the language. True even of the sinner before he accepts the Saviour. His desire also towards the unsaved one; for, did He not come 'to seek and to save that which was lost?

THE BRIDE'S PROPOSAL.

Verse 11—13.

Come, my beloved,
Let us go forth into the field;
Let us lodge in the villages.
Let us get up early to the vineyards;
Let us see if the vine flourish,
If the tender grapes appear,
And the pomegranates bud forth:
There will I give thee my loves.
The mandrakes give a smell,
And at our gates
Are all manner of pleasant fruits,
New and old,
Which I have laid up
For thee, O my beloved.

Shulamite speaks, in reply to the King, as having her heart on her native fields and vineyards—the rural scenes and employments in which she had been brought up. These more attractive to her pure and simple mind, with its genuine love of nature, than the splendour and ceremony of a court. Probably the wish also present, that her native locality might enjoy the benefit of her exaltation. But for all this, or whatever might be the object of her proposal, her Beloved must go along with her. Painful now any thought of separation from him. His presence and society her only earthly happiness and joy.

The Church of Christ and believers individually, happy as the Bride of the Son of God, look out in pity and in the bowels of their Lord, on the lands of the heathen, and a world lying in wickedness, to which they had themselves belonged. Thus the Church of Pentecost soon 'went everywhere preaching the Word.' This according to the will and commission of her Lord. 'Go ye into all the world,' &c. 'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me in Judea and Samaria, even unto the uttermost ends of the earth.' The apostles and disciples were to *begin* at Jerusalem, but not to stop there. Strictly, the resolution of the Church at Antioch, under the direction of the Holy Ghost, the first full verification of the text (Acts xiii. 1, &c). Subsequently, a second made by the apostles, to visit the places among the heathen where they had preached the Gospel, and 'to see how they did' (Acts xv. 36). Shulamite's 'come' an echo of her Beloved's (Chron. ii. 10—13). The Church, in time, responds to Christ's Call, and pleads the fulfilment of His promise. The text suggestive of

The Church's Calling.

That calling a Missionary one. The Church called to carry out the Mission of Christ into all the world. To be no longer the spring shut up, but streams flowing forth. Made the bearer of the glad tidings of a Saviour intended for all people. Christ is to be set up as an ensign in every land. That ensign to be carried and displayed by the Church (Isa. xi. 12; Ps. lx. 4). The 'day of good tidings' to be shared in by a perishing world. The King's commission to

his servants, to go out into the hedges and highways, the streets and lanes of the city, to invite in the poor and needy, and even to compel them to come to the marriage feast. The Gospel to be preached in the 'villages,' as well as the large centres of population. But observe—

1. *The Lord's presence with the Church necessary for success in her efforts for the evangelization of the world.* Shulamite's language to the King that of the evangelistic Church pleading with Christ for His presence. 'Come, my beloved, let us go forth,' &c. Moses' pleading with God to be that of the minister and missionary before going forth to deliver his message: 'If Thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.' Preparation important; but Christ's presence and power essential. Christ's word to the faithful and thoughtful preacher that to Gideon as the Lord looked on him: 'Go in this thy might; have not I sent thee?' Christ's promise to His sent servants: 'Lo I am with you alway.' The promise, however, to be pleaded in prayer, and laid hold of by faith. The resolve of the Apostles: 'We will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.'

2. *Christ's presence necessary also for His servants' strength and refreshment in the midst of their labours.* Christ went at times to take His disciples apart (Mark vi. 31; John xviii. 2). Himself whole nights in prayer. The Gospel-fishermen's nets to be mended in private, as well as managed in public. To teach others successfully, we need to be taught successively ourselves. The wheels of the Gospel chariot the better for frequent oiling. To be 'endued with fresh power from on high,' the preacher needs to 'tarry' awhile with the Master. The lamp shines more brightly in the pulpit after being trimmed in the closet. Christ's presence lightens the preacher's labour, and carries him over every difficulty. In labour or rest, the Master's presence the faithful servant's Paradise. Nature only lovely and delightful, when the Lord of Nature is with him.

3. *Love to Christ to characterize every preacher of the Gospel.* Shulamite's language to the King: 'Come, *my Beloved.*' Love to Christ the source of ministerial devotedness, and the secret of ministerial success. The motto of the prince of preachers. 'The love of Christ constraineth us.' The charge: 'Feed my lambs; feed my sheep,' only given to Peter after the thrice-repeated declaration of his love to the Master. The preacher to labour as a portion of the Bride of Him whom he preaches, and as therefore having a personal interest in the work. 'The Spirit and the Bride say, Come.'

4. *Promptness and diligence necessary in the Church's discharge of her calling.* 'Let us get up early to the vineyards.' The text of John Wesley's last sermon, preached after a laborious ministry of above half a century,—'The King's business requireth haste.' His own practice was to rise at four o'clock. The New Testament Church early and zealous in its labours for the evangelization of the world. The Apostle, some time before his death, speaks of the Gospel as having been preached 'in all the world,' and 'to every creature under heaven' (1 Col. i. 6, 23). Need for promptness. Men dying at the rate of one every second. Thousands dying daily without Christ, and without even the knowledge of Him. Vast 'fields' open, and 'white to the harvest.'

5. *The Church to inquire carefully into the success of the Gospel and the spiritual state of the world, both at home and abroad.* Ministers and missionaries not merely to preach and labour, but to look for results. The work the servant's, and the success the Master's. True, but success promised, and to be expected. God's promise that His Word shall not return to him 'void.' Generally the faithful and prayerful labourer who expects most, the most successful. Fulfilment of divine promises in regard to the Church and the world to be believingly and earnestly looked for. All flesh to see the salvation of God. The knowledge of the Lord to cover the earth. Men to be blessed in Christ, and all nations to call Him blessed. Christ to inherit all nations. The people to be gathered to Shiloh. The idols to be utterly abolished.

6. *The believer's love to Christ to be displayed in his diligently carrying out the Saviour's wish in regard to the evangelization of the world, and the conversion of sinners to himself.* 'There will I give thee my loves.' The Church and believer's warmest love to Christ found in connection with their most self-denying labours in making Him known to others. The believer *then* most acceptable to Christ, when caring most for the souls whom He bought with His blood. His 'loves' given best to his Lord when going in His bowels and in His steps after the sheep that was lost. 'There,'—not on the couch of selfish care and indulgence, but in the place of labour and sacrifice, in the spirit and work of His Master, does He give Him his 'loves.'

7. *The Church's aim to bring forth spiritual children to Christ.* 'The mandrakes give a smell.' The mandrake a very strong-smelling plant' growing in Palestine. The fruit, gathered in wheat harvest or the month of May, and perhaps other parts of the plant,

thought by the Orientals to favour conception (Gen. xxx. 14—16). The Church to be 'a joyful mother of children.' 'Married' to Christ that 'she may bring forth fruit unto God' (Rom. vii. 4). The part of faithful ministers and others to 'travail in birth until Christ be formed' in the souls of others. When Zion, in her ministers and members, travails, she brings forth her children (Isa. lxvi. 28). The preaching of the Gospel, accompanied by faith, love, and prayer, on the part both of preacher and people, the true means of the Church's spiritual conception.

8. *The result of the Church's labours an abundance of spiritual fruit.* 'At (or over) our gates (or door, according to the practice in Eastern houses) are all manner of pleasant fruits.' Such fruits the sample and foretaste of what was to come. The Church's fruits an acceptable gift to Christ. 'My soul desired the first ripe fruit.' 'I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit. Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit.' The minister's true ambition to have many souls to present to Jesus at His coming. 'Here am I and the children whom thou hast given me.' The most 'pleasant fruits' to Christ, the souls whom He has redeemed with His blood, sought out and brought to Him by His loving people. These fruits both 'new and old.' The Church's converts from both Jews and Gentiles, those of the Old Covenant as well as the New, those that were 'nigh,' as well as those who had been 'afar off.' In the New Testament Church the graces of the age of the Law increased by those of that of the Gospel. 'Instead of the fathers shall be the children.' Believers not to be satisfied with first principles, but to go on unto perfection (Heb. vi. 1).

9. *All the Church's works to be begun and carried on for Christ.* 'Which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.' Believers to do what they do 'heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.' Love to Christ to be the mainspring of the believer's labours. The salvation of a soul to be dear, but the glory of Christ still dearer. The salvation of souls to be dearest because Christ's glory is bound up with it. The strongest motive with a faithful and loving labourer, that Christ shall 'see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.' Love considers *that* best bestowed which is bestowed on its object. Mary's precious ointment best employed in anointing her Saviour's feet. All services now lovingly done for Christ to be one day called for, acknowledged, and rewarded. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

Shulamite's Wish.

Chap. viii. 1—4.

O that thou wert as my brother,
That sucked the breasts of my mother!
When I should find thee without,
I would kiss thee,
Yea, I should not be despised.
I would lead thee,
And would bring thee unto my mother's house,
Who would (or thou wouldst) instruct me.
I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine,
Of the juice of my pomegranate.
His left hand should be under my head,
And his right hand should embrace me.
I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
That ye stir not up,
Nor awaken my love,
Until he please.

Shulamite still addresses her Beloved, perhaps now already on the way to the fields, towards her mother's house. Expresses the wish that she could be as familiar with him even outside, as if he were her brother. She had desired his kisses; and now wishes she could becomingly repay them with her own. She could wish to have him with her in her mother's house, and be her instructor there; where on her side she would present him with the best of the beverages she possessed, as the fruit of her own labour in the vineyard. In language already employed in relation to the enjoyment of his fellowship and love (chap. ii. 6, 7), she pictures to herself the joy she should thus experience, and the care she would take that nothing should disturb it. The whole the language of a loving wife, expressed according to Oriental manners, and in the style of Oriental poetry. Observe—

1. *The renewed soul, brought to the realization of Christ's preciousness and love, and to the experience of the blessedness of being united to Him as His Bride, cannot be satisfied without the closest intimacy and unrestrained enjoyment of His fellowship.* An intense longing after more of His fellowship and love, a mark of the heaven-born soul, and of the Bride of Christ. Unable to enjoy in this world as much of that communion with Christ as he desires, he looks forward with wistfulness to a better. 'I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.' In heaven, believers see Him as He is; are fed by

Him as His sheep, and led by Him to 'fountains of living waters.' 'Follow Him whithersoever He goeth.' Their happiness there not merely to enjoy Christ fully, but to express, without restraint of fear or shame, the ardour of their love and affection. 'I would kiss thee.' Believers hindered in the present world, by causes both internal and external, from letting out their love on Christ as they would. The holy delight and satisfaction in doing so reserved for a better state. In reality, however, the language of the Bride realized in relation to Christ. The Bridegroom of the Church no longer as in the time of Old Testament saints, the mere infinite and absolute God—'the King eternal, immortal, and invincible, dwelling in that light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see.' The longing of the Old Testament Church fulfilled in the New. The Divine Bridegroom now our very 'Brother'—seen with our eyes, looked upon and handled with our hands (1 John i. 1). John leaned on His bosom. Mary held Him by His feet. The woman that had been a sinner kissed His feet while she washed them with her tears. Probably the disciples were in the habit of kissing His cheek according to the custom of the time; though the only such kiss recorded, alas! is that of the man that betrayed Him. His message after His resurrection—'Go and tell My brethren.' 'Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise took part of the same' (Heb. ii. 11—14).

2. *Christ still to be found 'without.'* Believers have still to go forth unto Him 'without the camp.' Christ still to the world at large 'a root out of a dry ground.' The world no nearer knowing Him now than when He sojourned on earth. The 'reproach of Christ' to be experienced till He shall come again. Danger of being 'ashamed' of Him 'in this sinful and adulterous generation.' Christ also found 'without' in His cause, and in the persons of those who are to be gathered to Him out of the world, both at home and abroad. 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye did it unto me.' Christ, in the person of His redeemed, found by the Bride after Pentecost in Judea, Samaria, and the lands of the heathen, and brought by her unto her mother's house, the Church.

3. *The desire of believers to have Christ brought into their mother's house.* (1) Into the *Church* at large, and especially that portion of it with which they are more immediately connected. 'Christ to be taken by the believer from the closet into the sanctuary.' Well when believers not only find Christ in the Church, but take him there. Jerusalem which is above, the mother of us all: yet to every believer, in a narrower sense, some section of the visible Church, and some particular congregation or mission, his 'mother's house,' in which he found Christ and was born again. 'Of Zion it shall be said, This man and that man was born there.' (2) The circle of their own *kindred and relations.* So Andrew found his brother Simon, and brought him to Jesus. Christ's direction to the restored Demoniac: 'Go home to thy friends, and show them what great things God hath done for thee.' Salvation and blessing promised not only to believers themselves, but, conditionally, to their family (Ps. cxv. 14; Acts. ii. 39). Hence households baptized with their believing head. Individual conversion to be followed by the conversion of the household. 'The religion of the closet and of the sanctuary tried and confirmed by that of the family.' Parents saved for the sake of their children as well as for themselves. On the other hand, the salvation of the children often followed by that of the parents. Noah was not only to enter the ark, but his family with him. Rahab was not only to be saved in the destruction of Jericho, but her father and mother, brother and sisters, along with her. The happiest family that in which Christ is made an inmate. 'No resting place to the Son of man sweeter than the bosom of a pious family.' Such the family at Bethany (Luke x. 38—42; John xi. 1, 2).

4. *The privilege of believers to be under the continued teaching of Christ and His Church.* 'Who would (or thou wouldst) instruct me.' All needful instruction in the possession of Christ. Christ the prophet, as well as the Priest and King of His Church. The Great Teacher. Hid in Him are 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' Natural that He should be the teacher of His Bride. Divine teaching promised to all the children of the true Jerusalem. 'All thy children shall be taught of the Lord.' Christ, 'the wisdom of God,' made 'wisdom' to those who are in Him. Believers to grow in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour. Much always to be learned. Here we know but in part. Our privilege to have the anointing of the Holy Spirit, that we may know all things. Eye-salve given by Christ, that we may anoint our eyes and see. Spiritual instruction to be found in the Church, our 'mother's house.' The Church furnished by her Head with the means for such instruction. Gifts of the Spirit bestowed for that purpose (Eph. iv. 7; Rom. xii. 7). True pastors and teachers Christ's gift. Believers to teach and admonish one another. Our privilege always, with Mary, to sit at Jesus' feet and hear his words. The Scriptures

given for our learning, that the man of God may be perfect. The great commission, not only to preach the Gospel, but to 'teach' the Church's members (Matt. xxviii. 20). The Bridegroom's voice to His Bride: 'Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart' (Matt. xii. 29). The most advanced believers the most earnest and humble learners. Believers never to be above ordinances, yet always to look above them to Christ. To be taught not by special revelation, but in connection with instituted means in their 'mother's house.' Must find the truth in ordinances, or cease to attend them (Prov. xix. 27). Will not hear the voice of strangers, but 'flee from them.' Believers after Pentecost 'continued steadfastly in the doctrine of the Apostles,' who 'daily in the temple and in every house, ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ' (Acts ii. 42; x. 42.

5. *The believer's duty and delight, to make a return for Christ's love with whatever he has or is.* 'I would cause thee to drink,' &c. The inquiry natural: 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits?' Believers constrained by the mercies of God in Christ to present their bodies to Him as a living sacrifice (Rom. xii. 1). The love of Christ constraineth us, to live not to ourselves but 'to Him who died for us' (2 Cor. v. 10). Our love desired in return for His. 'My son, give me thine heart.' Our love, manifested by obedience and self-denying service, His greatest refreshment and delight. 'I have meat to eat which ye know not of.' Christ refreshed and fed in His members. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren,' &c. 'He that is taught in the word, to communicate unto Him that teacheth in all good things.' What is given to His servants who teach in His name, regarded as given to Himself. 'He that receiveth you, receiveth Me' (Matt. x. 40—42). Believers after Pentecost 'sold their possessions, and brought the price and laid it down at the Apostle's feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need' (Acts ii. 45; iv. 34—37).

6. *Believers walking faithfully with Christ, warranted to expect the repetition of former enjoyment in His fellowship and love.* 'His left hand should be under my head,' &c. This happiness already, on a former occasion, enjoyed and recorded (chap. ii. 6). The delight once experienced in special communion with Christ, and the enjoyment of His manifested love, to be desired and expected by the believer in the course of his pilgrimage. That experience usually found in proportion to the desire after it, and in connection with faithfulness in following Christ, confessing Him before men, and seeking after the lost. Special communication of His love often Christ's loving reward for faithful, self-denying service. Yet an open door, and a hearty welcome will bring Him in to sup with us (Rev. iii. 20).

7. *Care always needed by the believer to guard against disturbing influences while in the enjoyment of Christ's presence and love.* 'I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,' &c. The charge already given on two former occasions (chap. xxvii. 3, 5). Always needful so long as the believer is in this world. Seasons of spiritual rest and enjoyment to be cherished and improved to the utmost (Acts ix. 31). Care to be taken not to grieve or quench the Spirit (Eph. iv. 20; 1 Thess. v. 19). Disturbing influences both within and without. Believers to keep the heart tender and watchful in entertaining a found Christ. No absolute freedom from interruption in the enjoyment of Christ till we see Him as He is.

Scene Second. Place: *The Country in the neighbourhood of Shulamite's native home*
Speakers: *The King, Shulamite, and Country People.*

Chapter VIII. Verses 5—7.

Shulamite Admired by the Country People.

Verse 5.

Country People.

Who is this
That cometh up out of the wilderness,
Leaning upon her beloved?

Shulamite's proposal to go forth into the country lovingly accepted by the King. The journey commenced, and now nearly completed. The happy pair now arrived at the neighbourhood of Shulamite's native home. Seen approaching, as she leans on her husband's arm. The Bride an object of admiration to the rustic inhabitants, who exclaim: 'Who is this?' &c. Beautiful and instructive picture of the believer while in this world. True always; especially true in the Pentecostal or primitive age of the Church. Notice in regard to

The Believer's Posture.

I. *The* Posture *itself.* Two features—

1. 'Coming up out of the wilderness.' (1) 'Coming.' The life of believers a *journey*, Like Moses to Hobab: 'We are journeying to the place,' &c. Sinners not pardoned to sit still. Brought up out of the horrible pit, and our feet set upon the rock, our 'goings' are established. The healed and pardoned paralytic takes up his couch and goes to his house. Believers have a home, and they *go* to it. (2) Coming '*up*.' The journey of believers an *upward* one, Their home on high. The 'heavenly Jerusalem;' the house with 'many mansions;' the 'better country, that is, an heavenly.' Their affections set on things above. Their journey an *ascent*. Their motto, Excelsior. Higher and higher. Progress heavenward characteristic of the believer. On the ladder, and ascending by it. Ascent often difficult and laborious. *Descent* easy, and requiring little effort. Salvation to be wrought out with fear and trembling. All diligence required to add to our faith, virtue, &c. (3) Coming up '*out of the wilderness*.' The world in which the believer finds himself, a wilderness. So Israel's journey to Canaan lay through a desert. A wilderness is—(i.) A place of *hunger and thirst*. (ii.) A place of *thorns and briars*. (iii.) A place of *danger both for man and beast*. The world unable to satisfy the wants and cravings of the soul. Full of trials and temptations. The place of the roaring lion, who seeks whom he may devour. An enemy's country. Believers, like others, once abiding in the wilderness. Willing to remain in it, though finding neither rest nor satisfaction. Aroused by a gracious voice: 'Arise and depart ye; this is not your rest.' Made to *see* it to be a wilderness. Like the prodigal son, they see their misery, and think of a home. Taking Jesus as their Saviour, they set out for it. Their back now to the wilderness, and their face to heaven. *In* the world, but no longer *of* it.

2. '*Leaning on her Beloved*.' Implies—(1) The *company* of her Beloved. Christ's presence promised to His people in their journey through the wilderness. 'Fear not, for I am with thee.' 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' 'I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' Hence their fearlessness. 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me' (Ps. ii. 3, 4). (2) The *support* of her Beloved. Christ the 'strength,' as well as 'righteousness,' of His people. His promise: 'My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Believers taught the 'happy art' of depending on Christ for all things. 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' Believers 'lean' on Christ—(i.) for *acceptance* with God, through His perfect obedience. (ii.) For *holiness* and victory over sin, through the grace of His Spirit; (iii.) For *protection* and preservation, by His Almighty power. (iv.) For *strength* and grace for the performance of every duty, and the endurance of every trial. Constant supplies of grace needed and received out of Christ's fulness for the wilderness journey. Great part of heavenly wisdom to lean on Christ at every step, and at every turn of the road. The life of believers a life of faith and dependence on Christ. The part of faith to lay the whole weight of our salvation, and the burden of every duty and difficulty on the Beloved. Believers only go upward as they lean on Christ. Resting on Christ essential to progress in holiness. Spiritual growth marked by conscious weakness leaning on perfect strength. Hence Milton's paradox: 'The omnipotence of human weakness.' Christ honoured and pleased by such dependence. To further it, He often removes from us every other support. Hence Paul's 'thorn in the flesh.'

The believer's life therefore—(1) A *laborious* one. An upward journey through a wilderness. (2) A *pleasant* one. The company of the Beloved. Pleasant company makes pleasant travel. (3) A *safe* one. An Almighty arm to lean upon.

II. *The* ENQUIRY. 'Who is this?' The sight—(1) A *rare* one. Far from common to see an individual going up from the wilderness, with his back to the world and his face to heaven, and especially as leaning on Jesus as his Beloved. The opposite of the character of the world. The sight everywhere met with is, worldliness, pride, and self-dependence. (2) A *beautiful and engaging* one. Beautiful in itself, and beautiful in the eyes of God, angels, and all right-minded persons, to see an individual giving up sin and the world, and with Jesus as his Beloved and only trust, earnestly proceeding on his way to heaven. Believers most amiable when seen going up out of the wilderness leaning on their Beloved. Worldliness and pride the blight and bane of the Church. A proud and worldly-minded professor a stumbling block to the world. A humble and heavenly walk attractive even in the eyes of ungodly men. (3) An *open and conspicuous* one. Believers going up from the wilderness leaning on Jesus, not able to be hid. A city set on a hill. The Master's will that they should be seen. 'Let your light so shine before men,' &c. The object not that they should be admired, but that God their Father should be glorified. Believers to be 'living Epistles of Christ, known and read of all men.' 'He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they

are wrought in God.' Believers to be God's witnesses in a sinful world. Their holy and heavenly life to be His constant testimony. Men to take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus. Made a 'spectacle to the world' for God's glory and the world's good. The heathen's testimony to the early Church: 'See how these Christians love one another.' Men to be drawn to Christ not merely by the preacher's lips, but by the believer's life.

THE REMINISCENCE.

Verse 5.

THE KING,

To Shulamite, who enters with him, leaning on his arm.

I raised thee up under the apple tree:
There thy mother brought thee forth,
There she brought thee forth that bare thee.

One of the obscurest passages in the poem. Apart from Jewish pointing, nothing in the form of the words to indicate who is the speaker. That pointing, comparatively modern, makes the words to be addressed to the King, and thus to be spoken by Shulamite. More reason, however, with all the Greek Fathers, and many of the Latin ones, to regard the King himself as the speaker, and Shulamite the party addressed. Moved, perhaps, by the sight of a familiar object as they approach her mother's dwelling, he reminds his beloved of what took place there at an early period of their connection; points her to the apple or citron-tree growing near the house, which had witnessed his endeavours, under its pleasant shade, to gain her affections, and his subsequent happiness when he there received her as his betrothed at her mother's hand. 'I raised thee up (or 'excited thee' to love) under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth (rather 'pledged thee' to me), there she brought thee forth (pledged thee) that 'bare thee.' Observe—

1. *First love and espousals between Christ and the believer never to be forgotten.* Never forgotten on Christ's side. 'I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals' (Jer. ii. 2). Believer's first love greatly prized and fondly looked back upon by the Saviour. 'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love' (Rev. ii. 4). Believers, on their part, to cherish the remembrance of Christ's early gracious dealings with their soul, and of their early affection and surrender of themselves to Him.

2. *Christ the first mover in the saving connection between a soul and Himself.* 'I raised thee up'—excited thee to love. 'Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.' The first spark of love to Christ in the soul kindled by Christ Himself. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.' 'I will betroth thee unto Me in lovingkindness and in mercies' (Hos. ii. 19; Jer. xxxi. 3). The soul espoused by Christ first 'raised up' by Him from spiritual death. 'Raised up' from a state of degradation and misery. Raised as a 'beggar from the dunghill, to inherit the throne of glory' (1 Sam. ii. 8). 'Raised up' from the deep spiritual sleep into which sin has cast mankind' (Eph. v. 14). 'Raised up,' finally, from the dejection and despondency common upon conviction of sin' (Acts ii. 37, 38; xvi. 30, 31).

3. *Those places precious and memorable to the believer that are associated with his early love and espousals to Christ.* The place of the altar where the Lord first appeared to Abraham in Canaan fondly remembered by him. Jacob reminded by the Lord Himself of the place where He first appeared to him as his covenant God. Those places of early love and communion afterwards gratefully visited. Their frequent remembrance profitable to the reviving and stimulating of love and devotedness to the Saviour.

4. *Spiritual ordinances,* in which Christ meets and espouses souls to Himself, *fitly compared to an*

Apple Tree.

(1) Because *full of Christ,* the True Apple Tree (chap. ii. 3). (2) From the *sweet refreshment* afforded in them to quickened souls. The apple or citron tree distinguished for its refreshing fragrance. (3) From the *rich and reviving fruit* enjoyed in connection with them. 'Thy words were found unto me, and I did eat them; and Thy words were the joy and rejoicing of my heart.' 'My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.' (4) From the *comfort and strength* afforded in them in times of temptation and trial. The citron-tree remarkable for its shade. The Psalmist's experience: 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple: for in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion. Mine head shall be lifted up above mine enemies round about me' (Ps. xxvii. 4—6).

5. *The part of the Church of Christ not only to 'bring forth,' but to 'pledge' souls to Him as His Bride.* The Church to be a mother of children, who, with herself and through her instrumentality, shall be espoused to Christ. Paul, as a minister of Christ, a representative of the Church when he says: 'My little children, of whom I travail in birth, until Christ be formed in you.' 'I have espoused you to one husband.' The Church never to forget her high calling, and never to be satisfied unless 'pledging' souls to Christ as His Bride.

6. *The divinely instituted ordinances of the Church, the means by which souls are ordinarily 'brought forth' to a spiritual life and pledged to Christ as His Bride.* 'There thy mother brought thee forth' (pledged thee). The ordinances of the Church instituted by Christ Himself for this purpose (Eph. iv. 8—12). 'In Christ Jesus have I begotten you by the Gospel.' Paul and Barnabas at Iconium 'so spake that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed' (Acts xiv. 1).

THE BRIDE'S REQUEST.

Verses 6, 7.

SHULAMITE, *to the King.*

Set me as a seal upon thy heart,
As a seal upon thine arm:
For love is strong as death,
Jealousy is cruel as the grave:
The coals thereof are coals of fire,
Which hath a most vehement flame.
Many waters cannot quench love;
Neither can the floods drown it.
If a man would give all the substance
of his house for love,
It would utterly be contemned.

Shulamite, still leaning on her Beloved, and taking occasion from the tender recollection he had just uttered, expresses on her side a desire indicative of the ardour and steadfastness of her affection. 'Set me as a seal upon thine heart,' &c. As a plea for her request, she urges the nature of true love. 'For love is strong as death, &c. Observe—

I. *The* REQUEST. 'Set me as a seal,' &c. Seals well-known to have been used, as they still are, for ratifying and confirming covenants (Neh. ix. 38; Jer. xxxii 10. 44; Rom. iv. 11). Used also for security (Deut. xxxii. 34; Job xiv. 17; Matt. xxvii. 66; Rom. xv. 28). May here allude to the practice of impressing marks upon the person with henna dye, or other material (Rev. vii. 3; xiv. 1; xx. 3). Shulamite's desire to have her name or likeness stamped upon her Beloved's heart and arm; on his heart or breast as the seat of affection, and on his arm, where it might be constantly in view. The desire of every loving heart to be kept in affectionate remembrance by one who is the object of its love. Love must have love in return. A fear, however, that love might be diminished by distance, especially where it may have rivals. Love trembles at the thought of the proverb proving true: 'Out of sight, out of mind.' The believer's strongest desire to be loved and affectionately remembered by his Saviour. 'Lord, remember me,' a prayer both in the Old and New Testament (Ps. cvi. 8; Luke xxiii. 42). The believer conscious how unworthy he is of Christ's love, yet cannot live without an assurance of it. That assurance granted in the words of the inspired prophet: 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget; yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have *graven thee upon the palms of my hands*; thy walls are *continually before me*' (Isa. xlix. 14—16). Typical of this fact, the names of the twelve tribes were engraved on the High Priest's breast-plate and shoulder-pieces, and carried with him into the Holy of Holies before the Lord (Exod. xxviii. 6—30). The import of the request—(1) *Preciousness and dearness* in the sight of the Beloved (Jer. xxii. 24; Haggai ii. 23). (2) *Nearness* to, or rather *oneness* with, Him. (3) An *unchanging and permanent place in His affection.* (4) A *constant remembrance* by Him. Observe—

1. Present communion to be improved by importunate pleading.

2. Love evinces its reality and ardour by seeking greater nearness and unchanging steadfastness.

3. The believer's earnest desire and distinguished privilege to be cherished by Christ's heart, and supported by Christ's arm.

II. *The* PLEA. 'For love is strong as death,' &c. The ardour and strength of Shulamite's affection, the reason of the desire to have an abiding place in that of her Beloved. Ardent love can only live on love. Conscious of the ardour and steadfastness of her own affection, she desires it to be reciprocal. Love which is not ardent and steadfast unworthy of the name. Hence Shulamite's descant on the

Nature of True Love.

1. Its *strength and irresistible* subject of it. 'Strong as death.'

more to be resisted in its approaches than death. Shulamite under the power of it in regard to her Beloved. Unable to resist it, she must love and be loved in return, or die. Like death, love must have its object. So Christ gave up His own life in order to have the Church whom He loved (John xv. 13; Eph. v. 25). Believers must have Christ, or die.

2. Its *tenacity*. 'Jealousy is cruel as the grave.' Jealousy an intense, vehement love, that cannot brook a rival (Prov. vi. 34). Same word rendered 'zeal.' Is 'cruel'—severe, unyielding, and tenacious, 'as the grave.' Like the grave, love will not quit its hold but at the command of Omnipotence. Jealousy implies—(1) Ardent affection; (2) Fervent desire of enjoyment; (3) Impatience of anything coming between love and its object; (4) Grief for any apparent want of return. Such the case with Christ's love and the believer's. Jealousy of Christ's love a proof of the strength of our own. Love to Christ makes us jealous of all that would come betwixt Him and us. Christ's love to His people can endure no rival in theirs to Him. 'I would thou wert either cold or hot.' Believers too apt unjustly to suspect Christ's love to them, while Christ has too much cause to be jealous of their love to Him.

3. Its *ardour and intensity*. The coals (or rather 'flames') thereof are coals (flames) of fire, which hath a most vehement flame' (or, 'a flame of Jah,' or Jehovah,—expressive either of its greatness, or its origin). The comparison common to all countries. The Song itself an exemplification of the text. True love not only intense, but painful and consuming, unless able to obtain its object. Believers not to be satisfied with a lukewarm love to Christ. Everything in Him to beget a fervent, burning love. Such a love sought by Him (John xxi. 15—17; Rev. iii. 15). Christ infinitely lovely and infinitely loving. Conjugal love to be ardent, intense, and self-sacrificing: love to Christ to be still more so. Christ's own love of that nature. 'The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up' 'He loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.' True, holy love, a 'flame of Jehovah,' from its origin as well as its ardour. Especially true of love to Christ. No true love to Christ which has not been kindled by the Holy Ghost. A divine flame of love to Christ kindled in the breast of every believer.

'There let it to Thy glory burn,
With inextinguishable blaze;
And, trembling to its source return,
In ardent love and fervent praise.'

The text the only passage in the Song apparently containing the divine name: 'a flame of Jah.' This, if the correct translation, perhaps intended to afford the key to the whole book. The Song of Solomon not only a 'Song of Loves,' but a Song of *divine* loves—of the love of Jehovah-Jesus to His Church, and the Church's love to Him, as kindled by the Holy Ghost.

4. Its *unquenchableness*. 'Many waters cannot quench love,' &c. True love survives all discouragements, and even coolness on the part of its object. Superior to all suffering endured on account of it. The love of Shulamite and the King had stood both tests. To exhibit, under an allegory, the unquenchableness of the love between Christ and His Church, probably one great object of the poem. A leading feature in love or charity, as described by Paul, that it 'suffereth long, beareth all things, endureth all things, and never faileth' (1 Cor. xiii. 4, 7, 8). The unquenchableness of the believer's love to Christ exhibited by 'the noble army of martyrs' (Rom. viii. 35—37; Rev xii. 11). By Paul himself (Acts xx. 24; xxi. 13). By many among the Jews, in the persecutions by Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. xi. 32, 33). Love's unquenchableness exhibited in its perfection by the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. v. 25; John xiii. 1). His love not drowned by the floods of suffering that men, or devils, or God Himself, as the righteous Judge dealing with the sinner's Surety, could pour upon it (Ps. lxix. 1, 2).

5. *Its unpurchaseableness and preciousness*. 'If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.' Three ideas—(1) *Love cannot be purchased by money or external gifts*. Too precious to be bought. Love will beget love, but money cannot buy it. 'Money answereth all things;' but cannot purchase love. The poorest peasant possessed of a treasure which the wealth of a millionaire cannot buy. A man's body and labour may be purchased, but not his love. Kind words and acts may generate it. Self-denying devotedness may give a claim to it, and may win it. But no money can be accepted as its price. Riches may gain the hand, but not the heart. Shulamite's love, though that of a humble peasant, not won by Solomon's crown and kingdom, but by his excellence and love. Believer's love Christ not for what He has, but for what He is. God is loved not because He is the greatest, but because He is the *best* of beings. Christ's goodness rather than His gifts, wins the sinner's heart. His cross the 'apple-tree' under which He gains the believer's love. Sinners drawn by the cords of a man and the bands of love (Hos. xi. 4). 'We love Him, because He first loved us.' Christ gave for the sinner's love, not the 'substance of His house,' but

the blood of His heart (Rev. i. 5; v. 9). (2) *Nothing can be given or accepted as a substitute for love.* Solomon's whole kingdom despised by Shulamite if offered in the place of his love. The riches of the universe contemptible to a quickened soul as a substitute for Christ's love. Heaven itself, with all its glory, were it possible, without the love of heaven's King, but a poor gift to the soul that loves Him. Hell made heaven with the enjoyed love of Christ, and heaven no heaven without it. 'In His favour is life.' 'Thy loving kindness is better than life.' On the part of man, all his gifts, without love, contemptible. (1 Cor. xiii. 3). Love the pearl in the oyster-shell. The shell without the pearl contemptible. (3) *Love not to be detached by the gifts of another.* True love superior to flattering promises as well as threatened penalties. Satan's bait only successful where love to Christ is nominal. The world able to withdraw Demas from his profession, but not John from his love. The believer not to be separated from the love of Christ by the height of prosperity, any more than by the depth of adversity. The believer's love, like Christ's own, superior to all enticements. His language, even at the stake, with a pardon offered for apostasy: 'If you love my soul, away with it.' 'None but Christ, none but Christ!' Love rejects with disdain the most flattering temptations to withdraw the soul from Christ. Esteems the reproach of Christ greater riches that the treasures of Egypt. Prefers a dungeon with Christ to a palace without Him.

This brief didactic discourse on the nature of true love, remarkable as here introduced into the Song. Apparently intended to give the key to the whole book. Remarkable also for its resemblance to Paul's discourse on the same subject in 1 Corinthians xiii. The passage probably a prophetic intimation of that exhibition of Divine love to be made in the fulness of time, in the incarnation, suffering, and death of the Son of God, as the Bridegroom of His Church, and the Saviour of the world.

The Bride's Intercession for Her Little Sister.

CHAPTER VIII. 8—14.

SCENE THIRD. **Place:** *Shulamite's Mother's House in the Country.* **Speakers:** *The King and Shulamite.*

Verse 8.

SHULAMITE.

We have a little sister,
And she hath no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister,
In the day when she shall be spoken for?

Now reposing with her beloved in her mother's house, Shulamite seeks lovingly to turn the visit to the advantage of a younger sister. The family being poor, she asks of her royal husband what they should do for her in the event of her being sought in marriage. 'What shall we do for our sister?' &c. Observe—

1. *Union and communion with the Saviour to be improved by the believer to the advantage of others, especially of his relations and friends.* So Esther with Ahasuerus at the banquet of wine (Esther vii. 3.) Communion seasons, especially, to be improved as times of intercession.

2. *The duty of believers to interest themselves in the welfare of others, and especially of those with whom they are more immediately connected.* Believers not to be satisfied to enjoy Christ and heaven alone. One individual saved for the benefit of others as well as himself. The privilege and duty of believers to save others (James v. 19, 20; Jude 23). Souls saved and blessing bestowed on others, in answer to believer's prayers. 'O that Ishmael may live before thee!' 'I have given thee all them that sail with thee.' The nature of grace to desire that others may share our happiness. The effect of sin to render men selfish and indifferent to the welfare of their neighbour. Godlike and Christlike not only to *be* good but to *do* good and to communicate.' Believers possessed of the Divine nature; and therefore, 'look not on their own things, but on the things of others.' All men our brethren. A brother or a sister seen in every child of Adam, however poor and degraded. The 'little sister' ever at our doors. Also found in China and Japan, in central Africa and New South Wales. More especially within the circle of our nearer kindred. Grace not to cancel, but to consecrate earthly relation-

ships. Men 'set in families' that one may take more special interest in the welfare of another. The happiness of one member to be made the happiness of the rest. Andrew 'findeth his own brother Simon,' and 'brought him to Jesus.' Noah was to enter the ark and bring his family with him. Lot was to take his kindred with him out of Sodom. Rahab's relatives to be saved with herself in the destruction of Jericho. A promise given to the believer concerning his house as well as himself. Hence whole households baptized at once. The language of Moses to his father-in-law to be that of believers to their kindred and fellow-men: 'Come thou with us and we will do thee good' (Num. x. 29). The new Testament Church to be Christ's witnesses and the bearers of His salvation to 'Judæa and Samaria, and the uttermost ends of the earth' The picture in the text verified in the Church's intercessions for a perishing world, begun in the upper room at Jerusalem and continued to this day.

3. *In caring and interceding for others, we do it for Christ's brethren as well as our own.* '*We* have a little sister.' Marriage makes community of kindred. United to Christ, what is ours becomes His, as what is His becomes ours. Our brethren His brethren also, by virtue of His incarnation and a common nature. The poorest and most degraded, a 'little sister' of Christ as well as of His people.

4. *The young to have a special place in the care and intercession of the Church.* The 'little sister' not to be overlooked because little. None too little to be saved, or to need salvation. Children cared for by Christ, and to be cared for by His people. 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not.' The lambs gathered with His arm, and carried in His bosom. His first charge to the penitent Apostle: 'Feed My lambs;' His second: 'Feed My sheep.' The most healthy, prosperous, and useful Church, that where the shepherd looks well to the lambs. The Church's wisdom, as well as duty, to remember the 'little sister' in her prayers and ministrations.

5. *Times when, in the providence of God, nations and individuals are favoured with the gracious offers of a Saviour.* 'The day when she shall be spoken for,' or sued in marriage. Such a time contemplated by Shulamite as likely to occur, sooner or later, to her still 'little' sister. The faithfully preached Gospel an offer of Christ as the sinner's Saviour and Husband. A demand made in it for the sinner's heart on the part of the heavenly Suitor. Every Gospel hearer wooed by the King of Glory to become His Bride. Every faithful minister, like John the Baptist, the friend of the Bridegroom, seeking to bring about a match between Christ and His hearers. The Gospel offer is the question put to Rebekah: Wilt thou go with this man? Paul's language to his converts: 'I have espoused you to one husband' (2 Cor. xi. 2). This offer made to all who hear the Gospel. The Gospel itself intended to be preached to all. Yet, in the providence of God, only reaches some. Time required for its promulgation. The harvest great; the labourers few. Labourers to be sent forth. Doors to be opened by Him who rules among men. The Church's duty to enter those doors as they are opened. That duty too slowly performed. The preacher directed in his mission by the Holy Ghost (Acts viii. 26—29; xiii. 2; xvi. 6, 7). The Gospel preached with power is an 'accepted time,' and 'day of salvation' (2 Cor. vi. 2). Blessed when men know the day of their merciful visitation.

6. *The Church not only to intercede with God on behalf of their fellow-men, but also to act as his fellow-workers for their salvation.* 'What shall we *do* for our sister in the day,' &c.? Shulamite's duty in relation to her 'little sister' not completed when she had interceded for her; something to be *done* for her. Praying for others to be followed by *doing* for them. The Gospel not only to be taken or sent to them, but something to be done while it is so. The Gospel, when preached, to be accompanied with earnest, believing prayer for its success. The hearers of it, as opportunity is afforded, to be counselled to accept of its gracious offer. Believers to be on the watch for souls when the Gospel is pressed home on men's hearts. The value of the Inquiry Room. Believers to help the preacher by endeavouring lovingly to bring the hearer to decision. Impressions to be fostered. Young converts to be carefully and tenderly watched over by the Church. All, however, to be done only along with Jesus. 'What shall *we* do?' &c. Poor work when even the believer goes to it alone.

The Royal Response.

Verse 9.

The King.

If she be a wall,
We will build upon her a palace of silver;
If she be a door,
We will enclose her with boards of cedar.

The King graciously receives Shulamite's suit, and promises that, with her co-operation, he will take proper care of, and amply provide for her little sister, according as her circumstances and conduct may appear to require. 'If she be a wall,' steadfastly resisting temptation, 'we will build upon her a palace (or tower) of silver'—endow her with a rich and ample dowry. 'If,' on the contrary, 'she be a door'—open to all comers—'we will enclose her with boards of cedar'—impose upon her due restraints, or bestow on her a dowry of much less value. Observe—

1. *The Saviour never regardless of His people's intercessions on behalf of others, especially of their own kindred.* 'Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons; and concerning the work of My hands, command ye Me.' As for Ishmael, I have heard thee; behold, I have blessed him (Gen. xvii. 20; Isa. xlv. 11).

2. *Christ associates His people with Himself in blessing and saving those for whom they intercede.* '*We* will build upon her,' &c. Believers to be ready to employ means, as well as to offer prayers. Abraham commended for 'commanding his children and his household after him,' that the Lord might bring upon him that which He had 'spoken of him'—the blessing He had promised (Gen. xviii. 19).

3. *Prayer for others not answered in all cases alike.* The answer given according to the circumstances of the case. Regard had to the requirements and behaviour of the party prayed for. Our comfort to know that prayer will be answered according to the judgment of infinite wisdom and goodness. Ishmael blessed in answer to Abraham's prayer, but not with the blessing of Isaac.

4. *A principle in the Divine procedure, 'to him that hath shall more be given, and he shall have abundance.'* Gifts increased or withdrawn according to their improvement. 'If she be a wall,' &c. A firm and steadfast 'wall,' to be adorned with a 'tower of silver': an open and yielding 'door,' to be nailed up with 'boards of cedar.'

5. *Christ a liberal giver.* 'We will build upon her'—not any ordinary dwelling, but—a 'palace;' not a palace of stone, but one of 'silver.' 'Able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.' 'Able to make all grace abound toward us.' And as willing as He is able. Giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not. 'Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?' 'Ye are not straitened in us: but ye are straitened in your own bowels' (2 Cor. vi. 12; Mic. ii. 7). No limit to the grace of Christ. Our privilege to receive 'out of His fulness, and grace for grace,' and to be 'filled with all the fulness of God.'

6. *Prayer sometimes answered by affliction and chastening.* 'We will enclose her,' or nail her up. To be nailed up, though with 'boards of cedar,' rather like a blow than a blessing. Yet, in the circumstances, the greatest boon. 'By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us.' Restraints of divine Providence often our greatest blessing. Often a special mercy when the Lord 'hedges up our way,' so that we 'may not find our paths' (Hos. ii. 6).

7. *The work of grace in the heart, a 'building.'* 'We will build upon her.' 'Ye are God's building.' The foundation of that building Christ Himself, accepted and trusted in as the only and all-sufficient Saviour. Christ also, by His Holy Spirit, the Great Master-builder. 'On this rock I will build My church.' Faithful ministers, and believers in general, according to their several gifts, subordinate builders and labourers. The building the joint work of Christ and His people: '*We* will build.' The building a glorious one—a palace of silver! rich, pure, and resplendent in glory. The residence of the King of Kings. 'An habitation of God through the Spirit' (Eph. ii. 19—22; 1 Pet. ii. 5; Col. ii. 7; Jude 20.).

8. *The duty of each, both before and after conversion, to seek grace to keep the heart and to resist temptation.* Our interest in being a 'wall' to resist, rather than a 'door' to admit, the tempter. 'Your adversary, the devil, goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist, steadfast in the faith.' Joseph a 'wall,' and becomes governor of Egypt, to 'save much people alive.' Dinah a 'door,' and after filling a town with bloodshed and misery, goes down into forgetfulness, leaving behind her only a dishonoured name (Gen. xxxiv. 1). Steadfast adherence to Christ's truth in the face of persecution, kindly noticed and graciously rewarded by the Master (Rev. iii. 10).

9. *The text realised in the Pentecostal Church.* That Church a *wall*—(1) *Against the attacks and threatening of their adversaries* (Acts iv. 13—20; v. 27—33, 41, 42; vi. 9—15; vii. 54—60). 'Overcame by the word of their testimony, not loving their lives unto the death.' Enriched, in consequence, with all grace and spiritual gifts (Acts ii. 41—47; iv. 33—37; Rom. xv. 14; 1 Cor. i. 4—7; 2 Cor. viii. 1, 2; Heb. x. 32—34). (2) *Against the attempts of Judaizers to bring the Church under the bondage of the Mosaic law* (Acts xv. 1—29). Paul a 'wall' throughout; Peter, at one time, in danger of becoming a 'door' (Gal. ii. 4, 5, 11—14). A world of evil, introduced when

afterwards the Church became a 'door,' admitting corruptions from Judaism, Gentile Philosophy, and Pagan superstition. Attempts, however, made by faithful men from time to time to enclose and nail up the door. Notably in the Reformation of the sixteenth century, by Luther, Calvin, Knox, and others.

Shulamite's Thankfulness.

Verse 10.

Shulamite.

I am a wall,
And my breasts like towers:
Then was I in his eyes
As one that found favour.

The Bride reminded by the King's words of her own happiness in the preservation of her purity and the enjoyment of his love. Arrived at a chaste womanhood, she had been honoured, notwithstanding her poverty and obscurity, to become the spouse of the King. Observe—

1. *An unspeakable mercy to be preserved, especially in the time of youth, from the allurements and temptations of an evil world.* That mercy to be thankfully acknowledged.

2. *The believer's duty to recognize the Lord's mercy in his preservation and spiritual growth.* A mercy to be in a state of grace; an additional mercy to know that we are. A divine injunction to know ourselves. 'Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobate?' The grace of assurance, however, commonly the result of faithful adherence to Christ, resistance to temptation, and growth in grace. 'Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience (or proof); and experience, hope.'

3. *Grace, a thing of progress and increase.* 'My breast like towers.' Not always so. Shulamite once like her 'little sister,' with 'no breasts.' The breasts also considerably grown since she began to have them. A world of difference between a man who is a true Christian and one who is not. But a great difference also between one true Christian and another. Some Christians only 'babes in Christ;' others 'full grown men.' Believers not to be satisfied with a low state of grace, but to go on to perfection. 'Be no longer children, but men.' 'Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.'

4. *The part of believers to be helpful to others.* Breasts given not for the use of the mother, but her infant. The Church to be a joyful mother of children. Each believer to be helpful in nourishing these children. 'Able to admonish one another.' 'Edify one another, even also ye do.' 'Exhort one another daily while it is called to-day.' 'Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.' 'Feed my lambs,' an injunction not confined to Peter or to ministers. The body strengthened by 'that which every joint supplieth.' 'Let every one please his neighbour for his good to edification' (Rom. xv. 2, 14; Col. iii. 16; Heb iii. 13).

5. *Christ's pleasure in His fa...ful people.* The soul most pleasing in Christ's eyes that has, in His strength, resisted and overcome temptation. 'Then,' when I appeared as a wall, 'I was in his eyes as one that found favour.' 'Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee,' &c. (Rev. iii. 10)

6. *A man's greatest happiness to find favour in Christ's eyes.* Recorded by Shulamite in relation to Solomon as her great happiness: 'I was in his eyes as one that found favour' (or peace). If the favour of an earthly monarch may count for so much, what of the favour of the King of Kings? 'In His favour is life.' Thy 'loving-kindness is better than life.' 'Many will entreat the favour of the prince' (Prov xix. 6). Alas! that so few should entreat the favour of Him who is the 'Prince of the kings of the earth.' The day approaching when all men will see how little it matters in whose eyes we may find favour, if we have not the favour of Him who shall sit upon the 'great white throne.' Happy for us that the poorest, humblest, and vilest may find favour in His eyes, not through any merits of our own, but by believing His Word, and heartily accepting the offer He makes of Himself in the Gospel. 'Justified by faith, we have peace with God through Our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom we have access into this grace, wherein we stand' (Rom. v. 1). True 'peace' found in finding and accepting Christ, who is 'our peace.' 'Whoso findeth Me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord' (Prov. viii. 35).

Shulamite's Self-Dedication.

Verses 11, 12.

Shulamite.

Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon:
He let out the vineyard unto keepers:
Every one for the fruit thereof
Was to bring a thousand pieces of silver.
My vineyard, which is mine,
Is before me;

Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand,
And those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.

Shulamite, intensely happy in the possession of her Beloved, gladly consecrates to him and to his service herself and her little all. She should be to him as his choice vineyard at Baalhamon,—perhaps a fictitious or poetical name, suited for the allegory, and denoting the 'lord of noise,' or 'possessor of a multitude.' As Solomon for his vineyard received a thousand pieces of silver as its rental, he should receive no less for what *she* brought him, while the keepers of the fruit should also receive suitable remuneration. She speaks of what she devoted to him as her own vineyard: 'My vineyard which is mine.' The language peculiar and emphatic. Probably intended to indicate no mere piece of landed property which she possessed, and which she now made over to her husband; but rather that which, both in itself and to Solomon, was worth more than the widest domains that could have been presented to him,—HERSELF. The same figure already apparently employed by her in the beginning of the Song, when she confessed to the ladies of the Court: 'They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept' (Ch. i. 6). This vineyard of her own person, she seems to say, she will no longer, as before, neglect; but would, for her husband's sake, cultivate it with all due attention, that she might be to him all that she *could* be, and, if possible, all that he could desire. 'My vineyard, which is mine, is before me; (present to my thoughts, and the object of my attention and care); thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand' (or rather, 'the thousand'—the full and ample revenue, as of the vineyard at Baalhamon). Those who should aid her in this self-cultivation should also receive a liberal remuneration: 'The keepers thereof two hundred'—a fifth of the revenue.

In Solomon's 'vineyard at Baalhamon' we may have a picture of the 'Kingdom of God,' with its privileges and blessings, as committed originally to the favoured descendants of Abraham. The parallel to the passage may probably be found in the parable of the Vineyard (Matt. xxi. 33—43; Isa. v. 1, &c.). The vineyard, in the Prophet, is ascribed to the 'Beloved' ('My Beloved,' namely, the Messiah), as here to Solomon, his type. Christ the Head of the Theocratic Kingdom in the Old Testament, as truly as He is head of the Church in the New. In His incarnation, 'He came unto His own,' literally, 'His own things,' His own kingdom or vineyard; 'and His own (his own *people*, the form of the word being altered), received Him not' (John i. 11). The 'vineyard' or kingdom, Christ's; as—(1) It has been given Him by the Father. (2) He has been constituted its Head and King. (3) He has purchased its blessings with His blood. This vineyard at 'Baalhamon;' the 'Kingdom of God' being set busy up in the midst of the world with its multitudes, its noise and unrest. The kingdom at first set up among the descendants of Abraham thus separated from the nations for a special purpose, afterwards extended to all the nations of the earth (Matt. xxviii. 19). The extension indicated in the change of Abraham's name, the added syllable being a modified form of the second part of the name in the text Baal-hamon. The transference of the kingdom or the 'vineyard' from the Jews to the nations of the world probably indicated in this part of the allegory, in which Shulamite becomes the vineyard of Solomon instead of that at Baalhamon. From the whole, observe—

1. *The part of a believer to consecrate himself and his all to Christ and His service.* Such dedication on the part of the bride to her husband, understood in the case of earthly espousals. No less real in the case of the heavenly ones.

2. *The believer himself individually, as well as the Church collectively, a 'vineyard;'* as reclaimed from the wilderness of the world, hedged in, cared for, cultivated by the Divine husbandman, and bringing forth precious fruit for its owner (John xv. 1—8; Isa. v. 1, &c.).

3. *Believers to make their own souls and those of their brethren the object of their special care and attention.* 'My vineyar which is mine, is before me.' Each has naturally his own soul to care for and attend to. But only a Cain asks: 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Our own vineyard to be carefully looked after: 'Keep thy heart with all diligence.' 'Keep yourselves in the love of God.' 'He that is of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.' Great part of 'pure and undefiled religion,' to keep ourselves 'unspotted from the world.' Believers to work out their own salvation 'with fear and trembling.' Each to interest himself in the welfare of his brethren and of the Church at large (1 Cor. xii. 26). 'Look not every man on his own things, but also on the things of others.' 'Seek not every man his own wealth,' or welfare. 'Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.' 'Exhort one another daily, lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.' 'Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.' 'Let every one of us please his

neighbour for his good unto edification' (Rom. xv. 2). The care required for our own and our neighbour's soul indicated in the expression—'Is before me.' Denotes—(1) Thoughtfulness. (2) Attention. (3) Watchfulness. (4) Diligence.

4. *The aim of the believer's care over His own soul and that of others to be that Christ may be glorified, and God in Him, in* '*an abundance of fruit.* 'Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand.' 'Herein is My Father glorified,' that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.' 'I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain' (John xv. 8, 16). The fruit brought forth by believers the reward of Christ's suffering for their salvation (Isa. liii. 11). The 'joy that was set before Him' in enduring 'the cross.' That fruit the 'fruits of the Spirit, being produced through His inward and spiritual agency. These fruits: Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, or self-control (Gal. v. 22). The spiritual benefit received through us by others, put down as 'fruit' to our account (Rom i. 13).

5. *Special keepers of the fruit of the vineyard appointed and to be recognized.* 'The keepers of the fruit thereof.' The care of these something over and above that which Shulamite herself should exercise over her vineyard. These appointed by her in conjunction with her husband, as her servants and helpers. The charge belonging to each believer in reference to his own soul and the souls of his brethren, neither to supersede nor be superseded by the special charge of others appointed for that specific purpose. These special 'keepers' given and appointed by Christ Himself for the benefit of His Church. 'He ascended up on high, and gave gifts: some, apostles; some prophets; some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints' (Eph. iv. 5). The general title of these in the New Testament, elders or Presbyters; called also, from the nature of their charge, bishops or overseers, and deacons with a temporal charge (Acts xiv. 23; xx. 17, 28; 1 Peter v. 14; Phil. i. 1). These given by Christ, but chosen by the believing people, guided by their knowledge of the gifts bestowed and formally appointed by those already in office (Acts vi. 2, 6; xiv. 23 (Greek); 1 Tim. iv. 4, 14). All these the Church's servants for Jesus's sake (2 Cor. 4, 5; 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22). The spiritual charge of these 'keepers' indicated in such admonitions as these; 'Take heed unto yourselves and unto the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.' 'Feed the flock of God, which is among you, taking the oversight thereof not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.' 'Remember them which have the rule (*Margin*, are the guides) over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God.' 'Obey them that have the rule over (*Margin*, guide) you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account' (Acts xx. 28; 1 Pet. v. 2, 3; Heb. xiii. 7, 17).

6. *Those occupied in the special charge of Christ's Church, or Vineyard, to receive suitable remuneration* 'The keepers thereof, two hundred.' A portion of that remuneration *here*, in—(1) The esteem and love of those to whom they minister (1 Thess. v. 12, 13; 1 Tim. v. 17). (2) A sufficient maintenance (1 Cor. ix. 7—14; 1 Tim. xvii. 18). Their principal remuneration, if faithful, *hereafter* (1 Pet. v. 4; 2 Tim. iv. 8; Dan. xii. 3). Christ a liberal paymaster. To work faithfully for Him is to do the best thing for ourselves, though not done with that object. When Christ receives *His* due among a people, His servants will not come short of theirs. Where the Master gets his 'thousand,' the 'keepers' will receive their 'two hundred.'

The Bridegroom's Request.

Verse 13.

The King.

Thou that dwellest in the gardens,
The companions hearken to thy voice.
Cause me to hear it.

Business arrangements over, the Bridegroom appears to desire his Bride to gratify the expectant friends as well as himself, with one of her songs. A similar request had on another occasion been made and complied with (chap. ii. 14—17). Then only the Betrothed of Solomon; now, his married wife. Then, dwelling alone in the clefts of the rocks; now, a happy resident 'of the gardens.' Observe—

1. *The characteristic of New Testament believers, that they 'dwell in the gardens.'* 'Gardens' indicative of separate congregations. The Church, as a whole, one large garden—the Church Catholic, as found scattered over the habitable globe. 'One body, one faith, one baptism.' But this one garden of the Church universal divided into numerous lesser 'gardens.' These also called Churches or congregations—a

larger or smaller number of believers living in the same locality, and united together as the professed followers of Jesus for Divine worship, personal edification, and the furtherance of His kingdom. Believers dwell together in unity. Jerusalem a city compact together. Such assemblies, *gardens;* as—(1) Separated from the wilderness of a world lying in wickedness. (2) Under spiritual and Divine cultivation. (3). Productive of the fruits of righteousness. (4) Pleasant to God, angels, and renewed men. The part of believers to have their place in these assemblies, not as mere visitors, but as regular members. Believers introduced outwardly into these 'gardens' by baptism; spiritually by regeneration and faith in Jesus. The visible bond and expression of their fellowship, the Lord's Supper, or 'breaking of bread' in commemoration of His death. The delight as well as outward place of believers is in these 'gardens.' 'Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.' 'How amiable are Thy tabernacles!' 'All my springs are in thee' (Ps. xxvi. 8; lxxxiv. 1; lxxxvii. 7). These 'gardens' especially the place where the voice of the Bride is heard in praise, prayer, and public testimony. 'Blessed are they who dwell in Thy house; they will be still praising Thee' (Ps. lxxxiv. 4; lxv. 1, 2). The Pentecostal Church exhibited as 'dwelling in the gardens.' 'They continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking bread, and in prayers. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God' (Acts ii. 42, 46, 47). Hence, *the happiness of a believer's life.* To 'dwell in the gardens' a picture of enjoyment. Believers not always dwelling alone 'in the clefts of the rock.' A new song put into their mouth, praise unto their God (Ps. xl. 3). These gardens, 'Paradise Regained,' and a picture of the 'Paradise of God.' Wisdom's ways pleasantness even in this life. Her children not dwellers in the desert, but 'in the gardens.' 'Instead of the thorn, shall come up the fir tree; and instead of the briar, the myrtle tree.' Believers blessed with a double heaven, one in the hand, and another in the hope. 'The rebellious dwell in a dry land' (Ps. lxviii. 6).

2. *The part of believers to 'hearken' to the voice of the Bride. The companions* hearken to Thy 'voice.' The voice of the Church heard both in its members and its ministers. To be 'hearkened to,' as uttered —(1) In testimony and teaching. (2) In counsel and admonition. (3) In warning and reproof (Matt. xviii. 15, 17). To be hearkened to with—(1) With attention. (2) With deference. (3) With submission (1 Pet. v. 5). Yet not with blindness and bondage. The voice of the Church to be distinguished from that of her Head. The Bride may err, but not the Bridegroom. Infallibility in the Bible but not elsewhere. 'To the law and to the testimony.' The Bereans commended for 'searching the Scriptures daily whether' the things spoken by the Apostles 'were so' (Acts xvii. 11). Even councils may err and have erred (Article XXI). Believers to try the spirits. To 'prove all things.' Believers themselves, as part of the Bride, possessed of the anointing whereby to know all things. 'Judge ye what I say.' 'He that is spiritual judgeth all things' (1 Cor. ii. 15; x. 15; 1 Thess. v. 21; 1 John ii. 20; iv. 1). Even Peter at one time to be blamed in his acting, and withstood by Paul to the face 'Subjection' not to be given to false teachers and corrupters of the truth, 'no not for an hour.' 'God accepteth no man's person' (Gal. ii. 6, 11).

3. *Believers to praise and pray in fellowship with each other.* 'The companions hearken to Thy voice.' Believers the 'companions' both of Christ and one another. David's testimony: 'My goodness extendeth not unto thee, but unto the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.' 'I am a companion of all them that fear Thee' (Ps. xvi 2; cxix 63). 'They that feared the Lord spake often one to another' (Mal. iii. 16). Praise comely every where; especially in 'the congregation of saints' (Ps. cxlix. 1). A special promise made to united prayer (Matt xviii. 19, 20). Believers not to forsake the assembling of themselves together for these purposes. An ill sign with a man when he 'separates himself' from the brethren (Jude 19; Heb. x. 25).

4. *The will of Christ that His people, amid all their occupations, should frequently address themselves to Him and to the Father in the language of praise and prayer.* His repeated wish at the Last Supper, that His disciples should, after His departure, continually address Him or the Father in His name, in

Prayer.

His will revealed through the apostles: 'Pray without ceasing: in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you' (1 Thess. v. 17, 18). The first business in which the disciples engaged after Christ's ascension accompanied with prayer, apparently addressed to Christ Himself (Acts 24, 25). Prayer seen to occupy a large place in the life of the Pentecostal

Church, and of the Apostles themselves (Acts ii. 42; vi. 4). The last utterance of the Bible, a prayer on the part of the Bride addressed to Jesus Himself (Rev. xxii. 20). Blessed to speak of Christ; more blessed still to speak to Him. The voice of the Bride, however, to be heard not only in prayer, but in

Praise.

The Sacrifice of praise to be offered to God through Christ continually, 'the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name' (Heb. xiii. 15). Praise and thanksgiving to form a large portion of a believer's life. 'In everything give thanks.' If so in the Old Testament, properly still more so in the New. David's life: 'Seven times a day do I praise thee.' 'At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee' (Ps. cxix. 62, 164). The New Song of the Redeemed in heaven learned and begun on earth. Believers have 'harps' for their praises as well as 'vials' for their prayers (Rev. v. 8). The 'praises of Israel' God's chosen dwelling place (Ps. xxii. 3). Believer's fellowship with each other to consist largely in songs of praise (Eph. v. 19). 'One word of Christ before we part.'—*Archbishop Usher.* Praise to be connected with our warfare and service in the Lord's cause. Jehoshaphat's army sang praise before the battle, as certain of victory (2 Chron. xx. 21, 23). Paul and Silas not only 'prayed,' but 'sang praises' in the prison at Philippi. The ransomed of the Lord to return to Zion with songs (Is. xxxv. 10). Christ our example in praise and thanksgiving (Luke x. 21). Sang a hymn with the disciples before going to Gethsemane. Sings praises in the midst of the Church (Heb. ii. 12).

SHULAMITE'S SONG.

Verse 14.

SHULAMITE.

Make haste, my beloved!
And be thou like to a roe,
Or to a young hart
Upon the mountains of spices!

At the request of her Beloved, Shulamite lifts up her voice in song. Her song resembling a former one (chapter ii. 17). Expressive of her delight in her beloved, and her desire for his constant society. 'Make haste (or flee), my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart (in swiftness as in loveliness and love), upon the mountains of spices.' The sweetness of his presence and the joy of his coming transferred to the mountains over which he was to pass. The very mountains which his feet should touch made 'mountains of spices' His abode, wherever it might be, made fragrant by his presence. Observe—

1. *The believer's song to have Christ for its subject as well as its object.* Isaiah's prelude to his song: 'Now will I sing into my well beloved a song of my beloved' (Isa. v. 1). David's: 'My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the King' (Ps. xlv 1). The Psalms full of Christ. 'Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs' (Col. iii. 16). The testimony of a heathen that the early Christians met together in the morning of the first day of the week and 'sang a hymn to Christ as to God.' The Church's hymns naturally full of the Bridegroom.

2. *The part of the believer to long for the presence of Christ.* 'Make haste, my beloved.' His spiritual and unseen presence desired *here.* Ordinances themselves barren and insipid if Christ be not in them. No pleasure to the loving believer if his 'Beloved' be not there. 'Thy presence makes my paradise.' His visible presence desired *hereafter.* Paul's desire to 'depart and be with Christ.' Absent from the body, present with the Lord. Hence 'to die is gain.' More especially His presence at His *second appearing.* That event the Church's 'blessed hope.' The Bride expects not merely to go *to* heaven *to Jesus,* but for Jesus to come *from* heaven *to her* 'Our conversation is in heaven from whence we look for the Saviour' (Phil iii. 20). His bodily return promised by the angels as He ascended into heaven. 'This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go up into heaven' (Acts ii. 10, 11). Preached by Peter after Pentecost: 'God shall send again Jesus' (Acts iii. 20). Promised by Jesus Himself after His ascension: 'Behold I come quickly' (Rev. xxii. 20). The subject of the Church's last recorded and inspired prayer: Even so come Lord Jesus.' This prayer of the beloved Disciple in the name of the Church apparently an echo of that of the Bride in the text. The same prayer concludes the Song of Solomon, and the Book of Revelation. Believers characterized as those who 'look for' Christ, and who 'love His appearing.' Old Testament saints looked and longed for His *first* Advent; those of the New for His *second.* Natural to long for the presence and return of those whom we love. To love Christ is to 'love His appearing.' Christ's highest glory and the deliverance of creation bound up with it (2 Thess i. 10; 2 Tim. iv: 1; Rom. viii. 17—23). His

appearing the full redemption of His saints (Luke xxi 28; Eph. i. 14).

3. *Christ's presence sweetens all.* 'Upon the mountain of spices.' His presence makes heaven, whether above or below the skies. Even rugged mountains converted by it into 'mountains of spices.' Samuel Rutherford, in his banishment, dated his letters from 'Christ's palace in Aberdeen.' The 'Mount Zion' in heaven, all that it is to the redeemed, because Christ, the Lamb slain, is upon it (Rev. xiv. 1). His presence *here*, the first fruits; yonder, the full harvest. His presence hereafter to be followed by no parting. His coming, therefore, the sweetest and most joyous event to His waiting Church, who shall then, as a whole, 'be for ever with the Lord.'

Blessed to conclude all our works and services, and to end each day of our lives and life itself, as Solomon concludes his Song, and John his Revelation, with the earnest and loving prayer, 'Make haste, my beloved, and be like to a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices.' 'Even so come, Lord Jesus! Amen.'

Notes.

CHAPTER I.

Verse 1: ***The Song of Songs which is Solomon's.*** 'The Song of Songs,' שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים (*shir hashshirim*). שִׁיר (*shir*), a song or poem, as opposed to prose: but distinguished from מִזְמוֹר (*mizmor*), a song with musical accompaniment, a psalm. Ewald, Zockler *in* Lange. According to some, a *series*. Kleuk. Augusti. שִׁירָה in its original acceptation, a string or chain; Arab poets speaking of stringing their verses as pearls. Good. 'Song of Songs,' a Hebrew reduplication denoting excellency. An instance of the Hebrew superlative, like Ezek. xvi. 7; Dan. ix. 24; the finest or most beautiful of songs, the comparison however probably not with other poetry of Solomon. Noyes. Not, as Gesenius, a song consisting of many songs. Nor, as Kimchi and others, a song out of many Songs of Solomon. The High Song (das Hohelied). Luther. The excellent song. Geneva Bible. Indicates emphatically the most excellent of its kind. Ewald. The noblest and sweetest song. Sanctius. The most excellent song, and made up many songs; or, comprehending all the songs, not only of Solomon but of the Prophets: the sum, kernel, and marrow of all sacred songs. Cocceius, Mercer. The most beautiful song. De Wette. A song consisting of many songs, or excelling other songs; indicating also the unity of its contents. Delitzsch. So called either from the excellence of the composition or the subject. Lowth. Most excellent song of all in the sacred books; in elegance of structure, fulness of mystery, and sublimity of meaning. Carpzov. Most important, excellent and precious of songs; reference to the *subject* of it; to prophets and apostles, a reservoir of the treasures of Divine love existing between the Creator and His saved and sanctified creatures; the title claimed not by Solomon, but by the Holy Spirit. Weiss. Other songs celebrate the King's victory and the deliverance wrought for His Church; this His marriage with her and His love to the Bride. Theodoret. Ten songs have been sung; but this excels them all. Targum. The song which is above all songs Rashi. All the Scriptures are holy; the Song of songs, the Holy of holies. Akiba. All the songs of Scripture are the Holy place; the Song of songs, the most holy. R. Joshua.

'Which is Solomon's' (אֲשֶׁר לִשְׁלֹמֹה *asher li-Shelomoh*). The relative probably not, as Gesenius thinks, added here on account of the article in הַשִּׁירִים as if—'the songs which are Solomon's. The antecedent either שִׁיר or הַשִּׁירִים; most likely שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים being added as a Hebrew form of the superlative. Ewald, Hitzig, Bleek. So the Septuagint, ὃ ἐστι, 'which is.' לִשְׁלֹמֹה to or of Solomon.' שְׁלֹמֹה (*Shelomo*) from שָׁלֵם (*shalom*) peace, with the termination ה or ו, identical with ן, and forming the concrete from the abstract. Meaning alluded to in 1 Chronicles xxii. 2. Gesenius. Davidson fancifully suggests ה as the representative of הוּא 'he'; as if, 'He is the peace' like Micah v. 5 and Ephesians ii. 14. The Alex. Septuagint has—to, for, or of Solomon (τῷ Σ.). The Vulgate: Solomon's. As referring to Solomon or ascribed to him. Vatablus. Both by and concerning Solomon, *i.e.*, Christ. Cocceius. Solomon as a type of Christ, both the author and the subject. Ainsworth. Words so contrived as to mean either. Patrick. Concerning Solomon, that is, the Messiah. Midrash. ל not used here merely to indicate the authorship: = 'devoted or delivered to;' as Psalm vii. 2; Jeremiah xv. 2; 1 Chronicles xxix. 2. Weiss. Of Solomon as the author. Mercer, &c. As the author inspired by the Holy Ghost. Carpzov. Belonging to Solomon, and so placed among the sacred books. Aben Ezra. Solomon as the author: Amplifies what David his father had begun in the 45th and 68th Psalms: the Bridegroom in the song called Solomon, either from the dignity of the name (Peaceful), or as suiting the circumstances, or because Solomon was a type of Christ, which was probably known to Solomon himself. Sanctius. According to Ewald, the title ascribes the poem to Solomon, but was given at a later period, pro-

bably after the exile. DELITZSCH: Indicates unity of authorship. ZÖCKLER: Which is by Solomon. His title of 'King,' assumed in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, here laid aside in contemplating the celestial person of whom he speaks. PATRICK. Also, lest Solomon should be thought the King here intended, the book being a 'Song of Loves.' GILL. Concerning Solomon: hence not a book of King Solomon's, but of some other inspired author. HARMER. Concerning Solomon—the true Solomon, the Lord Jesus Christ; no reference being made to King Solomon in any part of the book. HAWKER. Solomon the inspired author, yet not speaking in his own person. FRY.

VERSE 6. *Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards; but my own vineyard have I not kept.* 'Look not upon me' אַל תִּרְאוּנִי *al tiruni.* Look not at me. ZOCKLER. Gaze not OL me. WILLIAMS. With surprise and doubt, as if wondering at her presumption. NOYES. In admiration of her beauty. HITZIG. With scorn or disdain. WITHINGTON, GINSBURG. With too much scrutiny. TAYLOR. With indignation. DURHAM. With delight at my affliction, as Obadiah 12. AINSWORTH. With an evil eye. MERCER. Do not survey me in my vile dress, but consider how I have it. DEL RIO. *Allegorically*; TARGUM: Spoken by the Congregation of Israel to the nations: Do not despise me because I am more sorrowful than you, having done according to your deeds in worshipping your false gods, and having brought upon myself the Divine displeasure. FOLIOT: Do not look so much at my sufferings, as at the reason why I endure them, and the fruit which I shall receive from them. WEISS: Addressed by Israel to the nations wondering at their boldness after the sin of the golden calf, or astonished that they could commit so great a sin.

'Because the sun hath looked upon me.' שְׁשָׁזָפַתְנִי *sheshzaphathni;* from שָׁזַר *shazaph*; to burn or scorch; to blacken; hence also to look upon, as Job. xx. 9; xxviii 1. From שָׁרַר by the change of ר into ז. VULGATE: Hath discoloured me. AQUILA: Hath blackened me. WICKLIFF: Has scorched me. COVERDALE: Has shined on me. LUTHER: Has so burned me. DIODATI: Has touched me with his rays. MARTIN: Has looked on me. VATABLUS: Has fixed his rays on me. TIGURINE VERSION: Striking me with his beams. PARKHURST: Has looked down on me, or has shined on me. WILLIAMS: Has beamed upon me. FRY; Properly, looked with penetrating rigour. WEISS: Has glanced or gazed on me. BURROUGHS and GINSBURG: Has browned me. THRUPP: Fiercely scanned me. ZÖCKLER: Scorched me. MERCER: The blackness not natural but accidental. RASHI: Not natural, and therefore may be removed. A. CLARKE observes that the brown complexion of the Egyptians is attributed to the influence of the sun or climate. But probably no Egyptian in the text. *Allegorically*; TARGUM: Israel made black by the worship of the sun. FAUSSET: Scorched with God's anger, executed on her through the world-powers, because of her unfaithfulness before Messiah's coming. GREGORY, &c.: The sun of righteousness blackens the soul by the sufferings endured on his account, or by showing it its own blackness in his presence. PHILO CARPATHIUS: Do not despise me for my sins; since Christ the sun of righteousness has shone upon me. AINSWORTH, GILL, &c.: The Church blackened by the sun of persecution. ROSENMÜLLER: By miseries and calamities

'My mother's children were angry with me.' נֶחֱרוּ־בִי (*nikharu bhi*); from חָרָה to burn, or Piel of נָחַר EWALD. SEPTUAGINT, VULGATE, &c.: Fought against me COVERDALE: Had evil will. LUTHER, DIODATI, MARTIN: Were angry with me. So EWALD, DELITZSCH, and GESENIUS. Acted severely against me. A. CLARKE. Were severe with me. PERCY, GOOD, BOOTHROYD. Despised me; literally snorted at me: expresses the ill-treatment she received from her relations in exposing her to servile employments, which caused her dark complexion. Hence the Bride of low extraction compared with her royal Bridegroom. FRY. 'My mother's children' synonymous with brothers: her father probably no longer living at the time of this transaction. ZOCKLER. The children those of her mother by a former husband. HOUBIGANT, UMBREIT, EWALD, &c. Her countrymen. HARMER. Allegorically; TARGUM: False prophets and teachers, the cause of God's anger against Israel. RASHI: The children of Egypt, among whom I was brought up, and who came up from Egypt with me; and the the offspring of my mother in the wilderness. KEIL: Israel experienced, in consequence of their sin, the anger of the nations, and lost their beauty and glory. WEISS: The Egyptians were incensed against Israel on account of Noah's curse on Ham, and his blessing on Shem, and so treated them cruelly. COCCEIUS, &c.: Persecuting Jews. MUNSTER, &c.: False prophets and kings. SANCTIUS: The Gentiles. MERCER: Nominal members of the Church. DUTCH ANNOTATORS: False brethren. PISCATOR: Affec-

tions of carnal corrupt nature MENOCHIUS: All enemies, external or internal

'They made me Keeper of the vineyards.' הַכְּרָמִים *hak-keramim*, plural of כֶּרֶם *kerem*, a vineyard; from the unused root כָּרַם = כָּרַר, to be of a noble disposition; hence noble, fruitful; כָּרֶם, land planted with noble plants (Jud. xv. 5; Job. xxiv. 18). GESENIUS. A vineyard, possession, estate. EWALD. The noblest, most valued possession ZÖCKLER. Ground cultivated like a garden; used generally of vineyards, gardens, and plantations. SIMON. 'Made me keeper,' &c.; made her a drudge in their service, to her own personal injury; keeping vineyards, a servile work. PERCY, COBBIN. BOSSUET, on the supposition of the bride being an Egyptian princess, observes: 'The princess, by one of those family intrigues common at Eastern Courts, had perhaps been banished to some southern part of Egypt, where she had been employed on secular labour, till by a counter intrigue and revolution equally common, she was recalled from her banishment.' *Allegorically*; TARGUM: Taught me to worship their idols and to walk in their statutes. MERCER: Forced me to observe rites not prescribed by God. DU VEIL: Made me a zealous observer of their human traditions SANCTIUS: Forced me to follow sinful pleasures and practices COCCEIUS: Excommunicating me from their synagogues. AINSWORTH: To fall in with their corrupt worship and vain traditions. SCOTT: Drawn by original sin to evil things against my will. THEODORET, however, takes another view of the words, applying them to the Apostles: They gave me (the Gentile Church) the divine ordinances to keep. ORIGEN views them as spoken by the Apostles and others, who anxious about the salvation of men, suffered outwardly themselves. LYRA applies them to the drudgery of Israel in Egypt. DEL RIO thinks the vineyards were in the first instance the synagogue, then the Churches of the Gentiles. So COCCEIUS also views the vineyards as including the congregations of the faithful. FROMONDI sees the pastoral office indicated: Dispersed me among the Gentiles, and caused me to be made pastors and keepers of the Gentile Churches. DAVIDSON: The Christian Church charged with the care both of Jew and Gentile vineyards, in consequence of the Jews' rejection of God and His laws; or made the depository of the oracles of God with which they are to be fed. HAHN: The brothers, or Hamitic Heathendom, having withdrawn from the service of God and given themselves to the service of Satan, and so made their vineyard or the vineyard of God to become a vineyard of Satan, alienated the weaker sister from the service of God, and drew her into that of Satan, causing her to keep the vineyard, like themselves, in his service.

'But mine own vineyard have I not kept.' כַּרְמִי שֶׁלִּי *carmi shelli*, 'my vineyard which belongs to me.' MERCER: which was committed to me. ZÖCKLER: שֶׁלִּי (*shelli*), not only gives special emphasis to the suffix 'my,' but distinguishes her vineyard as quite distinct and of another kind from what she had been forced to keep, viz., herself, with all she has and is. GESENIUS, EWALD, &c., apply it in like manner to her beauty. SANCTIUS: That with which she was bought as her dowry, according to usual practice (Hos iii. 2); the same mentioned in chap. viii. 12 *Allegorically*; TARGUM: The Lord who is my God I have not served. The vineyard according to THEODORET, the traditions received before accepting Christianity; or, her own soul. SANCTIUS: The more noble part of our nature. BERNARD, &c.: The Jewish people (Is v. 1); or, the primitive Church composed of Jews, to whom Christ and the Apostles were first sent. MENOCHIUS: The charge of all the world's vineyards, and especially that of the synagogue, was committed to me. DEL RIO: I forsook the vineyard, at first committed to me on account of the conduct of the Jewish husbandmen in killing the heir (Matt. xxii.) JUNIUS: I departed from my duty. PISCATOR: Did not adhere steadily to the worship of God. AINSWORTH: The charge not kept either from her own infirmity and negligence, or from the tyranny of others, or from both: persecutions and afflictions often the effect of chastening for sin PATRICK: I was like one set to keep the vineyard of others, and could not look after his own: picture of the Gentiles seduced by false teachers into idol worship. GILL: Her own vineyard, either the Church or her own soul: not kept, either from fear or infirmity, or both. SCOTT: The treatment she received proved a temptation to neglect her duty and the care of her own soul, and so conduced to mar her loveliness. HAWKER: Neglected her own soul while engaged in the service of others. ROSENMULLER: Her own country's religion and institutions forsaken. DE WETTE: The Jewish vineyard neglected by the Jewish shepherds (Ezek. xxxiv. 7—9; Zech. xi. 8). THRUPP: The religious culture of all Israel. HAHN. The vineyard committed to her in the service of Satan she has not kept; having awoke to the painful feeling of her unrest, and learned to long after the better home with Israel's King.

VERSE 9: *I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.* 'To a company of horses' (לְסַסָּתִי *le-susathi*) סוּסָה (*susah*), fem., from סוּס (*sus*), a horse, may be either 'a mare,' or, as a collective noun, 'a stud or company of horses.' In the latter case, the final *yod* paragogic, as in Samuel i. 1; Isaiah. i. 21. GESENIUS inclines to the former view, thinking the comparison of a single loved one to a body of horse not so congruous. The latter favoured by ROSENMÜLLER, DE WETTE, NOYES, and others. The versions divided. SEPTUAGINT: My mare. VULGATE: My cavalry. LUTHER: My spirited team. WICKLIFF: My riding. DIODATI (*Italian*) and DUTCH: The mares. GENEVA: The troops of horses. MARTIN (*French*): The most beautiful pair of horses that I have. MONTANUS: My mare. COCCEIUS: My cavalry. *Yod* redundant. MERCER, VETABLUS. Not superfluous; '*My*,' because, chosen for his own. DEL RIO: 'My mare,' *i.e.*, my most beautiful mare. BOSSUET: My well trained steed. PERCY: One of the steeds; *Yod* paragogic. GOOD, BOOTHROYD. 'My horse;' a favourite mare of the King; a particularly fine and splendidly caparisoned specimen of those good mares which Solomon had for his chariots (1 Kings x. 26). ZÖCKLER. On the other hand, ROSENMULLER thinks there is no case of a beautiful woman praised by comparison to a mare. 'My horse,' a collective noun for all his cavalry (1 Kings x. 26) WEISS. My stud. GINSBURG. My horses. HODGSON. The team of horses. HAHN. PHILO has: 'As a swift horse that wins the prize. An Arab's mare his most valuable possession, and dearer to him than his fortune. GREENFIELD. Theocritus compares the comeliness of Helen to a Thessalian mare in a chariot; mares used in preference to horses both for riding and in chariots in the East, as being swifter and more able to endure hardship, and go longer without food. A. CLARKE.

'In Pharaoh's chariots.' Pharaoh a name common to the Egyptian Kings; denoting in Coptic, and according to Josephus, 'the King.' GESENIUS inclined rather to derive the title, in its Hebrew form at least, from פָּרַע (*phara'*), 'to lead in battle;' hence, פַּרְעֹה (*phera*), 'prince,' with the formative ה (*oh*). "'In the Pharaonic, or Egyptian chariots of Pharaoh;' more exactly, such a stud as was used on state occasions in Solomon's Pharaonic chariots; those costly teams which Solomon had imported from Egypt (1 Kings x. 28, 29.)" 'In Pharaoh's magnificent team.' DELITZSCH, EWALD. Horses of Egypt remarkable for their beauty and stateliness, and eagerly sought for the Kings of Syria. HARMER. Egyptian horses as the very best; and Egyptian horses in Pharaoh's chariots as the very best of all. CLAY. Pharaoh, Solomon's father-in-law, supplied him with most of his chariots. FROMONDI. A reference needlessly supposed by many to the chariots of Pharaoh at the Red Sea. So the TARGUM and the RABBINS, as well as the Roman Catholic and other Christian interpreters. BERNARD and FOLIOT: 'The Lord's cavalry or angelic host who overthrew Pharaoh's chariots in the Red Sea.' SANCTIUS: 'Such as are described in the Psalm concerning the triumph over Pharaoh.' DEL RIO: 'With the chariots of Pharaoh, *i.e.*, when they were drowned.' HAILGRIN: 'In [crushing] the chariots of Ph'. HENRY: 'My company of horses that triumphed over Pharaoh's chariots' (Hab. iii. 15). M. STUART and FAUSSET: 'In the chariots of Pharaoh' at the Red Sea; such being to Israel incomparable for swiftness and splendour.

The points of comparison: Swiftness and spirit: flies to her bridegroom like a horse which is spurred in the course. THEODORET. Drawing equally and elegantly together. SANCTIUS. Power to overcome enemies. DEL RIO, FROMONDI. Grace and beauty. DU VEIL. Beauty and speed. MERCER, PISCATOR. Stateliness, strength, and courage. DURHAM. Comeliness. ASSEMBLY'S ANNOTATIONS. Stateliness and beauty. POOLE. Affection. PERCY. Beauty, courage, stateliness, ahd other excellencies. DAVIDSON. Extends to the sumptuous trappings and ornaments. GOOD. Splendid decoration: these horses led forth on days of State, perhaps in some late procession of a royal marriage. FRY. Glittering ornaments of the head and neck. WEISS. The proud bearing of the horse (Job xxxix. 19). EWALD. Their harmony and usefulness. TRACT SOCIETY'S COMM. Her youthful freshness and unaffected behaviour. DELITZSCH. Ardour and beauty. FAUSSET. The formidable character of Pharaoh's horses at the Red Sea. THRUPP, WORDSWORTH. Their swiftness and splendour. M. STUART. The resemblance founded as much on the Bride's dress and ornaments as on her beauty. NOYES. Orientals spare no expense in ornamenting their horses with the most costly trappings, while the ladies decorate themselves in a similar manner. WILLIAMS.

CHAPTER II.

VERSE 1: *I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.* 'I am,' &c. Opinions divided as to who is the speaker. The Bridegroom. ORIGEN, THEODORET, and the great majority of Latin and Greek Fathers. The Bride. TARGUM, PHILO, PSELLUS, GREGORY OF NYSSA, and the great body of modern commentators. Either the Church, expressing the excellence of her grace and beauty received from Christ; or rather, Christ Himself, setting forth his own excellence. GILL. The Bridegroom, acknowledging the praises given to him by the Bride. PATRICK. More probably the Church, showing her graces received from Christ. AINSWORTH. Spoken by either; but rather by Christ, commending Himself to the notice, love, and acceptance of His people, like Isaiah lxv. 1. HAWKER. By the Bridegroom; the comparison made out of condescension. DURHAM, M. STUART. By Bride; no instance in the Song of either Bride or Bridegroom praising themselves. WEISS. Spoken by Bride with a becoming modesty. PERCY. In self-depreciation. BUSH. Representing her beauty as nothing extraordinary. NOYES. Speaks of herself as an object mean and contemptible amidst the beauties of the surrounding scene. FRY. Asserting she had no claim to such beauty as was ascribed to her. BOOTHROYD. Considering herself almost too mean for the Bridegroom. BARTH (*Bible Manual*). Speaking as well with self-respect as humility. DELITZSCH. As lowly, yet lovely. FAUSSET. 'The rose of Sharon' (חֲבַצֶּלֶת הַשָּׁרוֹן *Khabhatt'seleth hash'sharon*). חֲבַצֶּלֶת here rendered 'rose,' according to ancient interpreters, either the *lily*, as the SEPTUAGINT, VULGATE, and TARGUM of Isaiah xxxv. 1; or the *narcissus*, as the TARGUM *here;* or the *rose*, as the VENETIAN GREEK, KIMCHI, and ABEN EZRA. According to most modern Hebraists, the *rose* to be rejected, as the flower must be one with a bulbous root, from בֶּצֶל (*betsel*), a bulb. According to BOCHART, HAHN, and DE WETTE, the *narcissus*. EWALD and GESENIUS: the Meadow Saffron (*Colchicum Autumnale*), a meadow and autumnal flower like the crocus, with a bulbous root. So MICHAELIS, NOYES, WORDSWORTH, &c. EWALD derives the name from בָּצַל and חָמֵץ 'sour.' Means, radically, a plant with a pungent bulb,—inapplicable to the rose. FAUSSET. HITZIG, however, connects the word with חָמֵץ 'red.' PARKHURST, followed by WILLIAMS, derives the word from חבה, to hide, and צל, a shadow; as if a *rosebud*, or rose shaded with the calyx. The SEPTUAGINT, VULGATE, and THEODOTION have here simply, 'a flower.' AQUILA: a 'flower-cup.' The SYRIAC: 'a lily,' as in second clause. WICKLIFF and DOUAI VERSION: a 'flower.' GENEVA BIBLE: a 'rose.' BISHOP'S BIBLE: a 'lily.' So MUNSTER, MERCER, COCCEIUS, RASHI. A flower,—left indefinite. CASTALIO. Flower or rose. J. H. MICHAELIS. The flower, *par excellence*,—the flower of the whole earth. WITHINGTON. The flower; only, however, in a generic sense. GREEN. A wild-flower. GINSBURG. WITHINGTON. The tulip. MAGNUS, VAIHINGER. The daisy. THRUPP. הַשָּׁרוֹן properly, the Plain; from יָשַׁר, to be straight. GESENIUS. Or from שׁוּר, to look forth or around. BOCHART, EWALD. The word used as a proper name, and applied to the plain between Cæsarea and Joppa, fertile and abounding in lilies, roses, and narcissuses. GES., SANCTIUS. That between Mount Tabor and the Lake of Galilee. EWALD. Bride refers to her native place. GOOD. Sharon, the name of a district, then of a city in it (1 Chron. v. 16; Acts ix. 35). MERCER, PISCATOR. שָׁרוֹן, a plain; any considerable portion of level ground, whether fertile or otherwise: more than one in the land of Israel: the great Sharon, that beyond Jordan, in the land of Gilead and Bashan (1 Chron. v. 16): here, that between Tabor and the lake of Tiberias, rich in pastures, but not therefore suitable for roses and lilies. WEISS. SEPTUAGINT: a flower of the plain. VULGATE and WICKLIFF: a flower of the field. BISHOP'S BIBLE: the lily of the field. DIODATI and MARTIN: The rose of Sharon. SANCTIUS: A flower of the field; fenced around with no hedges; set forth to the eyes and for the use of all. FROMONDI: I am a flower of the open field, where you will rather find me than on the green bed. HARMER, PERCY, &c.: A mere rose of the field, where thousands and thousands grow of equal value: the thought suggested by the assemblage of beauty collected at the royal nuptials. WILLIAMS. The spouse compares herself with the more humble natives of the fields and valleys. WITHINGTON. Is disposed to humility by reflecting on her present good fortune as the King's Bride. ZÖCKLER. A

flower of the field; alluding to Christ's humiliation and incarnation. THEODORET. A humble scarlet flower; Christ lowly and red in His own blood. HONORIUS. Christ the flower of the heavenly plain, who far excels all cherubim and seraphim, and gives them all their beauty and excellence. FOLIOT. The flower of this whole world, of which Christ was the glory, inviting all to enjoy His sweetness. ORIGEN, AMBROSE, BEDE, DEL RIO. The Church of Israel with the Shekinah in her midst. TARGUM. The Church lowly, and delightful for odour and beauty (Hos. xiv. 7). AINSWORTH. Gratefully acknowledges the beauty given her by her Lord. DAVIDSON. The humility and faith expressed in Isaiah xlv. 24; Psalm xxxiv. 2. WEISS. Self-humiliation, the effect of a real manifestation of God to the soul. FRY.

'The lily of the valleys.' (שׁוֹשַׁנַּת הָעֲמָקִים *shoshannath ha-'amaqim*), שׁוֹשַׁנָּה *shoshannah* (from שׁוּשׁ *shush*, an unused root, 'to be white or splendid'), a noun of unity, from שׁוֹשָׁן *shoshan*, a lily; a flower growing wild in the fields of Palestine and adjacent countries; of various colours, but especially white and light blue; also apparently red (chap. v. 13). GESENIUS. Pliny speaks of red and purple lilies. Modern Jews, followed by LUTHER, MUNSTER, and CASTALIO, make שׁוֹשָׁן a *rose*, instead of a lily. KIMCHI, a violet. Signifies a lily in Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, and Persic; a six-petalled flower, from שֵׁשׁ (*shesh*), six: hence, not the rose, which has only five petals: only it is the *red* lily, familiar in the East. DELITZSCH. Not our Lily of the Valley (*lilium convallium*), but the noblest flower that adorns our gardens, and which in Palestine grows wild in the fields. WILLIAMS. One of the plants in which the number *six* predominates in the distribution of their parts, as the Crocus, Asphodel, Daffodil, Lily, &c. KITTO. Takes its name from its six leaves or petals, and from its vivid silver whiteness: a perfect specimen has seven flowers on the spike—one at the head and six on the sides of the stem. *Threefold Mystery*. MERCER and AINSWORTH think it may be the woodbine, which grows and flourishes in hedges, and is sometimes called the 'lily among thorns.' A common flower that throws itself out on every spot of ground. HARMER. 'The Huleh lily is very large, and the three inner petals meet above and form a gorgeous canopy, such as art has never approached: this incomparable flower delights most in the valleys, but is found also on the mountains. THOMSON'S *Land and the Book*. הָעֲמָקִים from עֵמֶק (*'emeq*), a valley. The name not applied to ravines, but to the long broad sweeps sometimes found between parallel ranges of hills. STANLEY. Low places also fruitful places (1 Chron. xxvii. 29). AINSWORTH. Lily of the 'valleys' more beautiful than those of the mountains, because always watered and less exposed to the heat. RASHI. Indicates a district not far from Sharon, as mentioned with it (1 Chron. xxvii. 29). M. STUART. The expression denotes an isolated and wild lily in the valleys. WEISS. The point of comparison in both cases is both the diminutive size of these plants, compared with cedars, cypresses, &c., and also their beauty and elegance; the Bride, though referring to her lowliness and rural simplicity, yet saying nothing derogatory to herself. ZÖCKLER.

VERSE 4: *His banner over me was love.*

'His banner,' דִּגְלוֹ (*diglo*), from דֶּגֶל (*degel*), a military standard. The SEPTUAGINT and VULGATE read the word as a verb; the former in the imperative: 'Marshal (*τάξατε*), love against me;' the latter in the indicative: 'He marshalled (*ordinavit*) love against me.' WICKLIFF: He ordained me in charity. LUTHER: Love is his banner over me. DIODATI: The banner which he lifts up to me. MARTIN: Which I carry. THEODORET, expounding from the Septuagint: Teach me the manner of love. RASHI: My band who guide me to him is love. MUNSTER, MONTANUS, and PAGNINUS: His banner over me or about me The expression, according to MENOCHIUS, equivalent to—'He drew me with the cords of love.' MERCER. He held love before me as a banner to attract me to himself. GROTIUS: 'He carries his love as an ensign before me,'—I serve under his banner, which is love. Similarly GESENIUS: 'I follow the banner of love which my Beloved presents to me, as soldiers follow a military standard and never desert it.' TIRINUS: 'Love,' that is, his love to me, by which he might subdue me to himself; and mine to him, that he might take me and all I have for his own. PISCATOR, JUNIUS, and MERCER: 'Having love towards me for a standard,—by which to call or draw me to himself.' SANCTIUS, expounding from the Vulgate: 'By his numerous kindnesses and sweetest blandishments he drew up all the array of his love against me.' So DU VEIL: He subdued me entirely to himself under the banner of love: he caused that I should cleave to him alone in love, as soldiers follow their standard. PATRICK: I am enlisted under his banner whose motto is love: he has overcome my heart so as to submit entirely to his wonderful love. MICHAELIS: He attacked me under the banner of love. ROSENMÜLLER: His banner for me is

love,—his love to me is conspicuous as a banner in an army. EWALD: Love was as a protecting banner over my head. ZÖCKLER: Love waves as a protecting and comforting banner over my head when I am near him. So DÖPKE, WORDSWORTH, and BURROUGHS. PERCY, and BOOTHROYD, reading the word as a verb in the imperative: 'Spread the banner of love over me.' FRY, following one of Dr. Kennicot's manuscripts: 'They have set up their banner over me.' FAUSSET: The banner inscribed with the name of the Captain who rescued us, Love. Some view the word as denoting the luminous standard carried before marriage processions. So PARKHURST; also HARMER: A cresset, or portable fiery standard. Others, perhaps still more correctly, as a 'flag or pendant, probably displayed on festive occasions.' So WILLIAMS. A banner usually displayed on the festive tent or banqueting house; perhaps having on nuptial occasions the word 'Love' inscribed on it. PERCY. A canopy, such as is carried over a Bride in the East. HUG.

VERSE 12: *The time of the singing of birds is come.*

'The time of the singing,' עֵת הַזָּמִיר (*eth ha-zamir*). Two meanings given to זָמִיר (*zamir*). GESENIUS and others derive it from זָמַר (*zamar*), 'to prune,' as in Leviticus xxv. 3; and so understand the expression as the 'time of pruning the vines,' or spring. So the Septuagint, Vulgate, and the ancients generally. RASHI, KIMCHI, ABEN EZRA, and most of the modern interpreters, understand the word rather as denoting 'singing,' from זָמַר, 'to sing.' So EWALD, who observes that vineyards are not mentioned till verse 13, and that the Greek ψάλλειν (*psallein*), equivalent to זָמַר, is used of the singing of birds. ZÖCKLER understands the word of *singing*, but rather the 'merry songs as of shepherds and country people.' Some understand it of the 'plucking and gathering of flowers.' So GREGORY OF NYUSA, DU VEIL, TIRINUS, and POOLE. HARMER and KITTO think allusion is made to the nightingale, which is heard in Palestine during the greater part of the garden season, singing delightfully in the day time among the pomegranate groves, and from trees of loftier growth in the night season. The time of *singing*, as more agreeing with that of the turtle's cooing. FAUSSET. SANCTIUS observes that vines are not pruned in spring, and prefers—'the time of cutting the cyprus in order to obtain its balsam in the gardens of Egedi.' LUTHER simply transiates: The time of spring. Variously allegorized. TARGUM: Time of cutting off the first born in Egypt. RABBINS: Time of Israel's redemption, cutting off of the first born, and rooting up of idolatry. WEISS: Cutting off of the idolatrous nations of Canaan. ORIGEN: Pruning at the end of the world, when the axe of judgment is laid to the root of the trees. GREGORY: Removing the reprobate from the Church, that the end of the world may come. DEL RIO: A spiritual pruning in baptism and repentance for the remission of sins. FOLIOT: In sacred confession. WILLERAMUS: By the preaching of the Word. CASSIODORUS: The pruning of the saints in and by Christ. PHILO: A daily pruning from all sin necessary to those who wish to be Christ's spouse. HONORIUS: Pruning the Church of its rebellious members. FROMONDI: Putting off of the old man and cutting away of the old shoots of vices. WICKLIFF: By the preaching of the Gospel. THREEFOLD MYSTERY: Pruning of the Gentiles after Christ's coming. ABEN EZRA. Time of singing the song by the Red Sea. BROUGHTON: Time of the Jew's return from the Babylonian captivity. FAUSSET: Time of rejoicing at the advent of Jesus.

VERSE 15: *Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines.* שֻׁעָלִים (*shualim*) foxes. So the old translators. Sometimes also used for *jackals*, as Judges xv. 4; Psalm lxiii. 11. GESENIUS. Probably both these dangerous animals; the word being a general name for animals of the fox and jackal species. EWALD. A term including jackals. FAUSSET. Jackals probably meant wherever the word occurs in the Old Testament. Dr. SMITH. ZÖCKLER, however, inclines to *foxes*, as jackals are always called אִיִּים, or תַּן. But, as Ewald observes, these rather poetically so called. BOCHART: jackals. HARMER: Jackals gregarious, but not foxes; distinguished from the latter as 'little foxes.' HASSELQUIST calls the jackal the 'little Eastern fox.' Jackals roam in troops about the villages at night. Very destructive in Judæa. BOOTHROYD. COBBIN: 'Eastern foxes very unlike ours: small delicate creatures; and while seemingly gentle and harmless, creep quietly into any chink left in the fence of a vineyard, and nibble at the young shoots which are thus injured or destroyed.' 'Little foxes.' ZÖCKLER: Young ones. MERCER: Little; as more hurtful to the vineyard, and more bold in doing damage. SANCTIUS: As more easily taken than when full grown. DEL RIO: Still few and feeble in spring, the time of germinating: the double expression used for a single one; 'the foxes, I say, while still little.' EWALD: In the early part of the year a prudent farmer will expel the foxes, especially the young ones.

'Take us,' &c.; catch us foxes, &c. A little vintage song, or a fragment of one, sung by the Bride. HERDER, ZOCKLER. Sung while she hastens to her Beloved; the song bearing a delicate allusion to their love-relations. DELITZSCH. An intimation that she was not disinclined to his taking part with her in the care of her vineyard. ZÖCKLER. Spoken by the Bride. GOOD, BURROUGHS, NOYES, THRUPP. Words borrowed from a popular song, but receiving a new meaning here from their connection. GREEN. The beloved is conceived by the Bride as commanding the servants and bystanders. EWALD. 'Let thy servants catch,' &c. COBBIN. Addressed by Solomon to his companions. MERCER, BOTHROYD. Sending them on their assigned employ. FRY. Spoken by the virgins to the friends of the Bridegroom. WILLIAMS. By the Bridegroom to Shulamite, directing her to look well to her vineyard. WORDSWORTH. A summons to the chase. TAYLOR, WITHINGTON. Bridegroom's words to his servants reported by the Bride as heard in her sleep. DEL RIO. Spoken to Shulamite by her brothers. GINSBURG. Uncertain whether spoken by Christ, or the Church, or both: more probably by Christ, and chiefly addressed to the ministers of the Church, directing them to discover and refute the errors of false teachers and heretics; and to judge, censure, and cast them out of the Church, or to avoid them if not of it. AINSWORTH, DURHAM, GILL.

CHAPTER III.

VERSE 7. *Behold his bed which is Solomon's.* 'His bed,' מִטָּתוֹ (*mittatho*) from נָטָה (*natah*), to stretch or recline. Not the same word as in verse first, which properly expresses a place for lying down upon. The word here generally understood to denote a palanquin or litter. A bed of repose, especially used by the rich (Amos vi. 4). Same as the 'chariot' in verse ninth, where it is described as; now before the eyes of spectators. EWALD. A royal bridal chariot or palanquin, afterwards called a 'chariot.' STUART. A travelling litter. FAUSSET. A portable bed. DELITZSCH. For the conveyance of the bride. HARMER. A palanquin of State large enough to convey both the Bride and Bridegroom. WILLIAMS. A common vehicle in which the great are carried throughout the East. COBBIN. The bed in which Solomon rests and is conveyed. HAHN. Only such a bed as the Bride used to be carried in from her father's house to that of her Bridegroom. WILLIAMS. A throne which, in the East, was in the form of a bed or couch. PATRICK. A palanquin, sedan, or portable vehicle, in which Kings in the East used to be carried when on a long journey; also a sort of pleasure couch, or sofa, on which they reposed by day when fatigued with business, or after a repast (Esther vii. 8; Gen. xlvii. 31). Sometimes also used instead of מִשְׁכָּב (*mishcab*), the bed used at night for sleeping on (2 Sam. iv. 5; Ps. cxxxii. 3). WEISS. 'His bed;' as used by him alone. BROUGHTON. As made by him. SANCTIUS. 'Which is Solomon's' (שֶׁלִּשְׁלֹמֹה *shelli-shelomoh.*) The relative שֶׁ, with a suffix, gives an intensive signification. ZÖCKLER. His bed, namely, that of him who is Solomon—the bed of Solomon himself. MERCER. Solomon's own palanquin. WILLIAMS. A form of expression not elsewhere found in the O. T.; but proper here, as used by the common people. EWALD. Of the King whose name is Peace. RABBINS. The name of Solomon in the Song to be taken historically of King Solomon. GENEBRARD. The Bridegroom's palanquin and attendance compared to that of Solomon. SANCTIUS. Describes the pomp of an earthly King, and probably Solomon's own royal state. BRIDE OF CHRIST. Though Solomon be named, a greater than Solomon is here. DR. CHALMERS. Solomon as the type of Messiah. MIDRASH. In the seventy-second Psalm, Solomon viewed as the Messiah. TARGUM, ABEN EZRA, KIMCHI, RASHI. Solomon's bed the Temple built by Solomon. TARGUM. The Tabernacle of the congregation and the Ark, which were carried in the wilderness. RASHI. The Ark of the Covenant brought by David to Jerusalem. WEISS. The Scriptures. THEODORET. Christ Himself in which the soul rests. AMBROSE. The Church in which Christ rests. PHILO, GREGORY, BEDE. The Temple of His body. COTTON, BROUGHTON. His humanity or His Cross. APONIUS. The loving, devoted soul. GREGORY. The hearts of the elect. COCCEIUS, AINSWORTH. Historically, refers to Jesus returning from the wilderness, full of the Holy Ghost. M. STUART His grave; *His*, as new. DAVIDSON.

VERSE 9. *King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon.* 'A chariot' אַפִּרְיוֹן *aphreyon*, a palanquin, or portable

bed; probably from פָּרָה 'to be borne quickly.' GESENIUS. According to the Talmudists, a bed, or nuptial couch, from פָּרָה 'to be fruitful.' EWALD and DELITZSCH derive the word from פרח (Arabic فرح to cleave, labour, elaborate: the chariot elaborately made as a state coach; more so than the bed, or travelling litter, in verse 7. So FAUSSET. COCCEIUS supposes that the Greek word here used (φορεῖον) might have come from the Hebrew through the Phœnician. The Syriac renders the word a throne; WICLIFF, a chair; COVERDALE and MATTHEWS' Bible, a bedstead; CRANMER and BISHOPS', a palace: GENEVA, a chariot; DOUAI, a chariot or bed. PISCATOR: A couch. MONTANUS. A bridal bed. PAGNINUS: An edifice. MUNSTER: A palace. The FIGURINE: A canopy. VATABLUS: A tent. MERCER: A portable couch, in which the Bride was carried for display. BRIGHTMAN: A chariot, showing his Majesty before the multitude. JUNIUS and TREMELLIUS: A throne. PATRICK: An open chariot, with a bed or cushion. GILL: Used in the Mishna for a nuptial bed, or open chariot, in which the Bride was conveyed from her father's house to that of her husband. WILLIAMS: A palanquin of state, probably large enough to carry both the Bride and Bridegroom. GOOD: A bridal couch. M. STUART: A royal bridal chair, or palanquin, borne on men's shoulders. DEL RIO. The Latin name *(ferculum)*, a conveyance used by the Romans for carrying the spoils or tokens of victory before the conqueror in a triumph; here something carried for show. HITZIG: A conveyance distinct from the מִטָּה, or bed, in verse 7; Solomon riding in that, while the Bride rode in this. ZÖCKLER: A portable couch, or litter; identical with the מִטָּה or bed, according to Rabbinical traditions and ancient versions, spacious enough to afford room for Solomon and Shulamite; though the former probably rode in a less showy vehicle by her side. Variously allegorized. TARGUM: The Temple. ABEN EZRA: The Holy of Holies. ALSHECH: The Tabernacle of witness. WEISS: The Throne-chamber, or Holy of Holies, with the Ark and the Cherubim, called 'the chariot' (1 Chron. xviii. 1—18). M. STUART: Account agrees with the Tabernacle, more especially with the Holy of Holies and Ark of the Covenant, borne on the shoulders of the Levites, like an eastern palanquin. FAUSSET: The Temple as compared with the Tabernacle, typical of Christ's body. THEODORET: The Apostles who carried Christ's name to the Gentiles. RUPERT and MERCER: The Word of God. GREGORY, AMBROSE, &c.: The human nature of Christ. WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY and M. STUART: The person of Christ. GREGORY, DEL RIO, DAVIDSON: Christ's Church and people; the renewed believing soul in which He dwells. SANCTIUS, COCCEIUS, DURHAM: The work of the Covenant of Redemption. GILL, SCOTT: The Covenant of Grace. THRUPP: The Cross of Christ. WILLIAMS: The Gospel in its onward progress. HENGSTENBERG: The means by which Christ brings the nations into His kingdom CHALMERS: May relate to the glories of heaven, and of His own person.

CHAPTER IV.

VERSE 6: *Until the day dawn, and the shadows flew away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense.* 'Until the day dawn' (עַד שֶׁיָּפוּחַ הַיּוֹם, *adh shey-yaphuakh hay-yom*), שֶׁיָּפוּחַ, composed of שֶׁ, for אֲשֶׁר, that, and יָפוּחַ from פּוּחַ, to blow or breathe; literally, till the day breathe. According to some, before the cool of the day; a cooling breeze usually blowing at that time in the East. So EWALD, GESENIUS, ROSENMÜLLER, and most of the moderns. Reference to the easterly gale which frequently accompanies the approach of the sun to the horizon. PARKHURST, PERCY, A. CLARK, PUSEY observed that a wind blows fresh both at the rising and setting of the sun. GILL. According to the earlier interpreters, the reference to the morning gale or dawn of day. A local beauty: in those hot countries the dawn of day is attended with a fine refreshing breeze much more grateful than the return of light itself. VATABLUS. Reference to the morning still preferred by some moderns. The refreshing breeze of dawn in the East, or air of life, which distinguishes morning from the death-like stillness of night. M. STUART, FAUSSET. 'Breathe:' a figurative expression for the reviving of the day after its apparent death. GOOD.

Till the day breathe forth, *i.e.*, *light;* may also refer to the blowing of the wind at the break of day. AINSWORTH. PISCATOR has: Till the day respire or refresh himself, *i.e.*, the sun, after the labours of the day. Ancient versions and Fathers connect with the preceding 'until evening,' when having fed, they (*i.e.*, the roes) return home. JUNIUS and DURHAM refer it to the day in which the marriage was to be consummated. According to DELITSCH and ZÖCKLER, the words spoken by Shulamite, as well as in chap. ii., 17. According to the former, the Bride modestly wishes to leave the hall for a more solitary place in the precincts of the palace, till evening shall bring her again into the King's presence. So BARTH (*Bible Manual*): the Bride unable to bear herself so highly commended, and desiring to prepare herself for the Bridegroom. Others, probably more correctly, ascribe the words to the Bridegroom. So EWALD: Till the day declines (*i.e.*, soon) would I enjoy thy beauty. GILL views the words as spoken by him in reply to the request of the Bride in chap. ii. 17. According to the author of the *Threefold Mystery*, he intimates the coming change—his withdrawal for a season—with, however, a word of hope. Allegorically: Till the evening of the world, when I will take thee to myself. PISCATOR. FROMOND: I will go during the night of this present life. DURHAM: Till the day when the Bride shall be taken into immediate communion with the Bridegroom. FRY: Till the day of Christ's second appearing. FAUSSET: Till the everlasting day: typically, God's taking up his abode in the Temple till the daybreak of Messiah's first appearing. MERCER and others: Day of the Gospel Dispensation, when the shadows of the law should pass away. GILL: The day of grace, and then the day of glory to elect souls.

'I will get me to the mountains of myrrh,' &c. According to some, the reference to certain localities. ZÖCKLER: Localities about the royal palace: solitary shady spots, perhaps beds of balsam (verse 13). UMBREIT: The region of Shulamite's home. HITZIG: Zion, as the seat of the Court. WILLIAMS: The Lebanon: the allusion to the fragrant groves of spices to be found in that country. A. CLARKE: Probably the mountains of Bether. COBBIN: The object to obtain perfumes for the Fair One. Others regard the language as figurative and denoting the Bride herself. GROTIUS: The breasts of the Bride, with allusion to the fragrant substances upon them. PERCY: The Bride compared to an entire heap of perfumes. EWALD: Shulamite's beauty so compared, as inviting from its sweet perfume. Allegorically: The temple on Mount Moriah. TARGUM, RASHI, ABEN EZRA. Mount Moriah, where the oil was made out of pure myrrh: Mount Zion as a figure of the Church. HENGSTENBERG. Where Isaac was offered. *Old Commentators.* Where frankincense was offered on the altar of incense; the Lord promising to dwell in the Temple now dedicated to Him (2 Chron. vii. 12—15). WEISS, FAUSSET. Reference to the Temple and its prayers and services, where Jesus often brought the devotion of holy prayer. DEL RIO. Heaven. PISCATOR. The heavenly Jerusalem. JUNIUS. As the place of special holiness. SANCTIUS. The abode of martyrs and confessors. HONORIUS. The abode of angels, spoken of in the East as having bodies of perfume. HARMER. The mediatorial kingdom of Christ, where He presents to the Father the incense of His finished atonement. HAWKER, and the author of *Threefold Mystery*. Refers to the crucifixion and death of Jesus. GREGORY. Christ went willingly to death: the mountain of myrrh His death, the hill of frankincense His resurrection and ascension. THEODORET. Christ's mountain full of rich gifts, but only available for us by the bitterness of His death. DEL RIO. Historical reference to Calvary, and the embalming of the Lord's body with the myrrh and aloes till His resurrection. M. STUART. The Bride or Church of Christ, even now lovely and precious in His eyes as the mountain of myrrh. PATRICK. The Church, where the graces of His people flow, and where their prayers are as incense. DURHAM. Where Christ takes up His abode till His second coming. GILL. The Church assembled under the Gospel ministry, where the name of Jesus, like frankincense, fills the hearts of His people with the savour of His presence. HAWKER (*Notes*). On the sweetly smelling sacrificial fragrance of the mountain of myrrh (his Bride) he will delight himself from morning till evening. HAHN. Souls whose fleshly lusts are mortified by the myrrh of repentance. FROMONDI. Reference to a life of prayer and contemplation. TIRINUS. As spoken by the Bride. The Church will flee for safety from her persecutors to the place prepared for her in the wilderness (Rev. xii. 14). COCCEIUS. Will wait for the day, retiring for prayer and meditation. HAWKER. To the mountain of sacrifice and the hill of praise. DAVIDSON. The soul in great distress fleeing to Christ for refuge in prayer and meditation. AINSWORTH.

VERSE 8. *Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon; look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards*

'Come with me' (אִתִּי תָּבוֹאִי *tabhoi*

iii). אִתִּי sometimes read as the imperative of אָתָה 'to come.' So the SEPTUAGINT and VULGATE, followed by COVERDALE and LUTHER. Viewed by most as from אֶת 'with' and י 'me.' So the TARGUM, DIODATI and MARTIN. By others as denoting 'to me.' Solomon invites the Bride to his arms as a place of safety. PERCY, WILLIAMS, BOOTHROYD. EWALD strangely supposes the words put by Shulamite into her absent lover's mouth. Bridegroom invites the spouse to come into more pleasant and secure places. PATRICK. To make an excursion with him to admire together the grand and beautiful scenery. DÖDERLEIN. To see the mountains mentioned, and to be crowned with their flowers. DEL RIO. Bride, after last meeting, had returned home, and, being a shepherdess, had been feeding her flocks as far as Lebanon, &c. "*Bride of Christ.*" Solomon meets his betrothed on the summits of Lebanon, and invites her to leave it along with him. M. STUART, DELITZSCH. Announces to her that her home should henceforth be with him in the royal palace. ZÖCKLER. 'Lebanon' (לְבָנוֹן from לָבַן *laban*, 'to be white,' the 'white mountain, the Mont Blanc of Palestine'), the magnificent range of mountains, so-called, situated between Phœnicia and Syria, with a double line, called the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon. Remarkable for the grandeur of its appearance, its silvery aspect, its fertility and beauty. The abode of wild beasts (2 Kings xiv. 9). A forest or wilderness in comparison with other places (Isa. xxix. 17). Place of the Bride's nativity and upbringing. SANCTIUS. Bride exhorted to leave her paternal abode with the Bridegroom. THEODORET. Solomon recalls her descent from a simple shepherd's family in the mountain region of Northern Palestine. ZÖCKLER. The Bride's seven-fold beauty the ground on which she comes down with the King from Lebanon and its mountain peaks, and from the haunts of lions and panthers, where she had dwelt on the other side of Lebanon. HAHN. Allegorically: The congregation of Israel invited to come to the Temple, and dwell with the Lord there. TARGUM. The divine presence promised to Israel when they should be carried captive from Lebanon and should return thither. RASHI. From the Temple, or the city and land where it is situated. ROSENMÜLLER. Israel to leave the temporary sanctuary and follow the Bridegroom in the spiritual way of perfection, being assured of His presence with her in the path of suffering. WEISS. Lebanon the Temple from which Christ calls His people to remove (Zech. ii. 1; compare Matt. xxi. 13). M. STUART. The Church called to forsake idols, and to leave all and follow Christ, her Bridegroom; like Psalm xlv. 10. THEODORET, DAVIDSON. Called from the splendour of worldly glory. HONORIUS. From some situation of danger. BUSH. From false Churches and societies of wicked people to walk with him in newness of life. AINSWORTH The Church invited to heaven. PISCATOR.

'My spouse.' כַּלָּה *(callah)* a bride; according to GESENIUS, from כָּלַל *calal*, to crown, 'the crowned one;' but according to others, from כָּלַל to perfect; a term of affection and esteem, used to express the relation of a son's wife to his father and mother—a 'perfect one.' PARKHURST, WILLIAMS, SIMON. Never used with *my*. The Bride so called in direct relation to her husband's parents rather than to the husband himself; equivalent to '*daughter-in-law*;' the title being retained as long as her husband's parents were living (Gen. xxxviii. 11, 16, 24; Ruth i. 6—8). FRY. More directly applied in reference to the Bridegroom or husband (1 Sam. iii 10): the idea of the word being *completion, totality*; a family being only complete upon a son's marriage, and the prospect of issue in the male line; the Bride or daughter-in-law, being the person through whom the name, honours, and inheritance were to be continued '*Three-fold mystery.*' Shulamite here for the first time called the Bride: hitherto only 'love' or 'friend;' this section immediately following the consummation of the marriage. PERCY. So-called on account of the day being appointed for the marriage. JUNIUS.

'Look from the top of Amana,' &c תָּשׁוּרִי (*tashuri*) susceptible of two meanings—to 'look' and to set out on a journey.' The latter preferred by ZÖCKLER and others as parallel with תָּבוֹאִי. Thus understood by the SEPTUAGINT (διελεύσῃ.) So LUTHER. The VULGATE: Thou shalt be crowned; either from שׁוּר to rule (SANCTIUS), or from אָשַׁר to be happy (DEL RIO). So CALMET: The Bridegroom promises to deck her with a crown, and make her his Bride. TARGUM: Thou shalt see persons coming, *i.e.*, with presents. So ROSENMÜLLER. GROTIUS: I will conduct thee through the most pleasant parts of my kingdom. COCCEIUS: Come and enter into possession: look forth on the inheritance. PERCY: She may now look down in security amidst

any dangers of which she was apprehensive. FRY: The Bride, in passing from her home to her husband's abode, would obtain from the heights of these mountains a gratifying prospect of the land of promise. DELITZSCH: Solomon would conduct her from one summit of Lebanon to another, and give her to see and enjoy the prospect of his wide dominions. 'Amana' (אֲמָנָה), the name of a mountain in the north of Palestine. RASHI At present not precisely known: probably belonging to the same range of mountains in Antilibanus as Shenir and Hermon. WEISS. Not likely, as A. CLARKE, the mountains dividing Cilicia and Assyria. WILLIAMS: A mountain in Syria; the valley and the river called by the same name, Amana and Abana (2 Kings v. 12; *Keri* אמנה *Amana*). GESENIUS: The name of a river rising in Antilibanus and watering Damascus, and giving its name to that part of the Lebanon. According to later Jews, only the name of a river. EWALD: Amana, some part of Lebanon not far from Damascus, whence a small river of similar name had its rise, called Abana. MICHAELIS: Abana probably the river now called Fiji. ZÖCKLER: Amana, the peak lying farthest to the east and north-east of the Anlitibanus range. 'Shenir' (שְׂנִיר, better read שְׂנִיר *Senir*), the name of Mount Hermon with the Amonites (Deut. iii. 9); as Sirion (שִׂרְיוֹן) was with the Sidonians. In a stricter sense, a part of Hermon or Antilibanus lying to the north, and now called by the Arabs, *Jebel Senir;* Hermon being distinguished from Shenir both here and in 1 Chronicles v. 23. GESENIUS. Shenir the more northern, Hermon the more southern, of the principal peaks in the Hermon or Antilibanus range. ZÖCKLER. Sirion identical with Shenir, meaning a breastplate; referring probably to its glittering breastplate of ice. STANLEY. 'Hermon' (חֶרְמוֹן). A high mountain of Antilibanus covered with snow, now called *Jebel Sheikh.* Sometimes as here, and in 1 Chronicles v. 23, distinguished from Shenir, the common usage apparently fluctuating. Hermon consisted of more mountains than one (Ps. xlii. 7), these mountains being called also Zion (Deut. iii. 9; iv. 48). GESENIUS. The poet here only varies the names, because one meant the same as another to him. HITZIG, ZÖCKLER. Amana, Shenir, and Hermon, all different mountains of the Lebanon chain. COBBIN. The SEPTUAGINT, strangely translating the first name, Amana, has: 'From the beginning of the faith.' In the second clause, however: 'From the top,' &c.; as the VULGATE in both clauses. The passage thus allegorized. THEODORET: Shenir and Hermon the law or legal life. WEISS: Wild mountains of Israel's captivity. DAVIDSON: The whole land of Gentile ESAU—the Gentile and estranged wilderness. PATRICK: From the horrid mountains, where thou wast exposed to the rage and cruelty of furious and troublesome men, look down and behold the goodly heritage I have purchased for thee. PISCATOR: Heaven to be beheld by faith. DURHAM: Elevate the heart to heaven; *look,* at least. FRY: The believer, like Moses on Pisgah, obtains a prospect of the promised rest. GILL: The Church called to look down and see how the Gospel was received by the nations: or, Christ's call to His Church to leave the society of the wicked men of the world, and go along with Him (2 Cor. vi. 17; Rev. xviii. 4). 'Lion's dens and mountains of leopards.' A poetical exaggeration of the mountains around Shunem, as if to be compared with Lebanon; alluding, in a general way, to the wild beasts and inhospitable character of the region of Shulamite's home (Zech. ii. 3; Jer. xii. 5; Deut. xxxiii. 22). ZÖCKLER. Allegorically, the inhabitants of strong towns, who are strong as lions. TARGUM. Furious Jews and crafty Gentile philosophers. THEODORET. Malicious, cruel, and hypocritical men. JEROME, GREGORY. Heretics. PHILO, ANSELM. False brethren. HONORIUS. Persecuting tyrants. PISCATOR, DURHAM. Regions of idolatry, of which Egypt whence the Bride came (?) was one of the most remarkable HARMER. Babylonian lions and Chaldean panthers. WEISS. Savage, beastly, and idolatrous people. AINSWORTH. These mountains, thus beautiful but dangerous, put in contrast with the mountain of myrrh and hill of frankincense. BURROUGHS.

Verse 9. *Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse: thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck.* 'Thou hast ravished my heart' (לִבַּבְתִּנִי *libbabhtini,* a verb formed from לִבֵּב *libbebh,* from the noun לֵבָב *lebhabh,* a heart); 'thou hast wounded or taken away my heart.' GESENIUS. 'Hast enchanted me, made me wholly thine own.' ZÖCKLER, DELITZSCH. According to this view the Piel form of the verb has a privative signification like סִכֵּל (*sikkel*), to clear away stones; or שֵׁרֵשׁ (*sheresh*), to uproot. According to others, לִבֵּב, like the same in Syriac, denotes to give heart or encourage. So the niphal form of the verb in Job. xi. 12.

לִבַּב, to get a heart or wisdom. So GREGORY. COCCEIUS, EWALD, and others: Thou hast heartened, or emboldened me. WORDSWORTH and some Rabbins: Behearted me—coupled my heart to thine. SEPTUAGINT: Thou hast hearted us. SYMMACHUS: Hast emboldened me. VULGATE, followed by COVERDALE, MATTHEWS, GENEVA and DOUAI versions: Hast wounded my heart. CRANMER and BISHOP'S Bible: Hast bewitched my heart. LUTHER, MONTANUS, PISCATOR, MERCER: Hast taken away my heart. DIODATI and DUTCH Version: Hast robbed me of my heart. MARTIN: Hast ravished my heart. So JUNIUS and TREMELLIUS, PARKHURST, PERCY, GOOD, BOOTHROYD. MUNSTER: Hast fascinated my heart. TIRINUS and TIGURINE version: Hast taken possession of my heart. So PATRICK. ABEN EZRA: Hast taken away my heart. KIMCHI: Hast wounded it with the arrow of thine eyes. RASHI: Hast drawn my heart to thee. TARGUM: Written on the tablet of my heart is thy love. AINSWORTH: Thou hast taken, pierced, wounded my heart, ravishing it with love and delight. DE WETTE: Hast robbed me of my heart. NOYES: Hast taken my heart captive. UMBREIT: Hast robbed me of courage. HAHN: Hast unhearted me. WEISS: Hast cherished, known, esteemed, and loved me. CLAY: The word not found elsewhere in the Bible in this form and sense: Christ's love so unspeakable, new words to be coined to express it.—'With one of thine eyes'. (בְּאַחַת מֵעֵינָיִךְ *be-akhadh me-enaik*) 'With one of the glances proceeding from thine eyes.' ZÖCKLER, HENGSTENBERG. So JUNIUS, LE CLERC, PERCY, GOOD, &c.; supposing that something, as רְאִי, has either been dropped out of the text, or is to be understood after בְּאַחַת. Masorites proposed reading באחת instead of באחד, עין being feminine. So the Keri and many MSS. EWALD: With a single one of thy glances. DELITZSCH: With one of thy looks. AINSWORTH: Even a side or profile view of her face charms him. So WILLIAMS. PARKHURST: The least glance I have of thee and of thy beauty. KENNICOTT: At once with thine eyes. So BOOTHROYD, COBBIN, HODGSON. RASHI: I would have loved thee with only one of thy charms. SANCTIUS: Perhaps one eye hidden by the veil or crown. Eastern women unveiled only one eye in conversation. TERTULLIAN, NIEBUHR, NOYES.—'With one chain of thy neck' (בְּאַחַד עָנָק מִצַּוְרוֹנָיִךְ *be-akhadh'anaq mits-tsavronaik*). עָנָק (*anaq*) a collar, from עָנַק, 'to adorn or clothe the neck' (Ps. lxxiii. 6). GESENIUS. With one chain of thy necklace; Shulamite's neck looking so charmingly in it. ZÖCKLER. The word however only to be taken figuratively. PERCY. With one stone of thy necklace. EWALD. In Eastern descriptions, the dress and ornaments quite as much praised as the person: so in our own old ballads. "*Bride of Christ.*" PATRICK understands a 'wreath of hair.' So HITZIG: A ringlet or lock of the first hair hanging down on the neck. A. CLARKE thinks the reference to the play of the muscles of the neck. So GOOD and PERCY: With one turn of thy neck. BOOTHROYD: At once with the turning of thy neck. צַוְרוֹן (*tsavron*), a diminutive of endearment, from צַוָּאר (*tsavvar*); 'thy tiny neck.' GESENIUS, EWALD. The dual or plural used to indicate the hair hanging on both sides of the neck. AINSWORTH. SEPTUAGINT: With one ornament of thy neck. SYMMACHUS: With one necklace. AQUILA: One lock. VULGATE: One hair or ringlet. LUTHER: One of thy neckchains. DIODATI and MARTIN: One of the necklaces of thy neck. So MERCER, PAGNINUS, &c. MUNSTER: With one fillet.

'My sister, my spouse.' A bride also called 'sister' among the later Arabians: so *soror* applied to a mistress in Tibullus. GESENIUS. The designation of a certain relationship: the spouse now Solomon's lawful wife, and next to him as a sister to a brother. ZÖCKLER. 'My sister,' a word of tenderness and endearment, used by husbands to their wives: so Tobit, vii. 16; viii. 4, 7. PATRICK. Relations and kinspeople called by the Jews brethren and sisters. GILL. The Church Christ's sister by His assumption of our nature; His spouse, by love and marriage-covenant. BEDE. The Church so called out of love, and in respect to regeneration and adoption (Heb. ii. 11). AINSWORTH. The Lord's heart drawn by even one right thought directed towards Him. SANCTIUS. Christ easily and willingly overcome by His own. DURHAM. The Bride's poverty of spirit looking forth behind the veil of her dove-like eyes, one of the two great features of her beauty that won the heart of the King; her humility of spirit the other. HAHN.

CHAPTER V.

VERSE 2: *I sleep, but my heart waketh.* 'Sleep,' יְשֵׁנָה, *yeshenah*, a participle or adjective, from יָשַׁן, to sleep. GESENIUS. The connection with what follows gives to יְשֵׁנָה and עֵר the sense of imperfects: 'I was sleeping,' &c. ZÖCKLER, HITZIG. So GOOD, PERCY, BOOTHROYD, &c. DIODATI, MARTIN, and DUTCH: I slept or was asleep. Was sleeping as if inebriated with delights. MICHAELIS, A. CLARKE. Had laid her head down on her couch, waiting for her beloved, and had fallen asleep, and now relates her dream to her companions. GREGORY. Recounts an adventure, or perhaps a dream. PERCY. Most likely the latter. A. CLARKE. A dream, indicating perplexity and unconnectedness, and containing reminiscences of the former one. EWALD. Another part of the poem begins here: in Solomon's absence, the Bride relates a dream to her attendants or the daughters of Jerusalem. DELITZSCH. A dream, indicative of her state of mind some days after the marriage festivities, her longing having been awakened for her native home. ZÖCKLER. The scene transferred to the Bride's lowly cottage in the city, where she refused her husband admittance at night; a scene in accordance with her original position, but most inconsistent with her present rank, and explicable only on the ground of allegory. M. STUART. Second half of the Book begins here, shewing the Bride's original condition, and how her longing for the King was brought about. HAHN. 'My heart waketh.' Rather, was waking or awake. So EWALD, ZÖCKLER, &c. לִבִּי (*libbi*) 'my heart;' used in the O.T. sense, of the centre and organ of the entire life of the soul. ZÖCKLER. My soul. EWALD. My mind. DAVIDSON. The intellectual faculties or region of thought. HITZIG. Her sleep nearer waking than sleeping. SANCTIUS. Like Balaam, fallen asleep, but with the eyes open (Num. xxiv. 4). PATRICK. Spoken of one asleep, or partly so, being excited by an unexpected call. FRY. Her mind awake and filled with the object of her affection. NOYES. Thus allegorized; TARGUM: Israel, when carried to Babylon, like a man asleep and unable to awake. RABBINS: Asleep as to the commandments, but my heart awake to the duties of piety: asleep as to my redemption, but the Blessed One awake to redeem me. WEISS: Ancient Church relates her experience after the dedication of the Temple (2 Chron. xii. 1; Isa. i. 21; v 7; Jer. ii. 21; Sam. iv. 1); a moral sleep intended; a state of spiritual drowsiness and inactivity. AINSWORTH: The spouse having eaten and drunk largely of the blessings of Christ, begins to remit her zeal, and neglect the works of faith and love: the heart, however, or inner man, the spirit, or the man as he is regenerate, still awake. DEL RIO: Awake in the inward soul, while the external senses were lulled. HAHN: An unnatural sleep; the original condition of the Bride or the Gentile nations living without God; a life without liveliness, as a sleep. ZÖCKLER and HENGSTENBERG: A dark scene: Apostasy of unbelieving mankind from God; especially the rejection of the Saviour. GREGORY and early interpreters: Saved from the billows, the Church falls asleep on the shore. BROUGHTON and COTTON: State of the Church in Constantine's time. DAVIDSON: The disciples before Christ's resurrection.

VERSE 4: *My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door.* 'By the hole of the door' (מִן־הַחוֹר, *min ha-khor*; literally 'from the hole'). Through the latticed window. ZÖCKLER. The opening which served for a window. EWALD. At the window or casement. PATRICK. Probably rather a hole in the door. The hole in or near the door. RASHI. Above the lock. HAHN. In the wall. HITZIG. The attempt made to open the lock inside. Oriental houses still made with a hole in the door, or rather door-post, by which the master and domestics open the locks by putting in their hand, while strangers neither dare nor know how to do so, the locks being variously made: at night, additional bolts and bars so fasten the door that it cannot be opened from without. WEISS. When the bolt was too strong for the finger to move, or the hole too small, a key was used: otherwise, the finger inserted into the hole could move the bolt and open the door: at night, a pin was passed before the fore part of the bolt, to prevent its being opened on the outside: the Bridegroom had put in his finger to see if this had been omitted. DEL RIO. A key in the East usually a piece of wood with pegs or pins in it corresponding to small holes in a wooden bolt within, and is inserted through a hole in the door to push back the bolt. FAUSSET. The locks are placed on the *inside* of the doors of gardens and outer courts, and even on those of inner rooms of some places. To enable the owner to open them, a hole is cut in the door, through which he thrusts his arm and inserts the key. THOMSON, *Land and Book*. SEPTUAGINT: Withdrew his hand from, &c. So BURROUGHS and GINSBURG. VULGATE, followed by MARTIN: Put his hand.

LUTHER, DIODATI, WICKLIFF: Through the hole. GENEVA: Through the hole of the door. PISCATOR and MONTANUS: From the hole. JUNIUS and TREMELLIUS: Had put down his hand from, &c. THEODORET: To awaken the Bride. PISCATOR: To effect an opening. SANCTIUS: To remove the bolt. PATRICK: As if attempting to draw her out of her bed, or threatening to punish her. HITZIG: As if intending to climb in by the window. HENGSTENBERG and WORDSWORTH: Forcibly to break a hole through the wall, like Ezekiel viii. 7, 8. Allegorically: His hand, the Divine energy. THEODORET. A secret inspiration on the heart. FROMONDI. Something tending to awaken the Church. BRIGHTMAN. To arouse the lingering and fearful. COCCEIUS. His vengeance in the days of Ahaz. RASHI. Efficacious grace. GILL. Historically, the reference to the incarnation. HONORIUS. To the scene in the judgment-hall of Caiaphas. M. STUART, FAUSSET. To the resurrection of Christ. PHILO. To the inward working of His Spirit, as at Antioch (Acts. ii. 19, 21. AINSWORTH, FAUSSET.

VERSE 5: *My hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling on the handles of the lock.* 'Dropped with myrrh.' נָטְפוּ־מוֹר *natephu mor*, literally 'dropped myrrh.' So SEPTUAGINT, VULGATE, LUTHER, &c. MARTIN: The myrrh dropping from my hand. The myrrh from Solomon's having taken hold of the lock on the outside with profusely anointed hands. ZÖCKLER, WILLIAMS. From the unguent flowing in from the outer lock through the keyhole. HITZIG. Some drops inserted by her lover through the hole or above the door, and trickling down on the inner lock, showing how richly anointed he had come to her. DELITZSCH. Left on purpose by himself. EWALD, TERUPP, ROWE. Proceeding from the moisture of his hand when he introduced his finger to remove the bolt. DEL RIO, NOYES, HAHN. She imagines how her beloved, while calling her, had smeared the lock with perfume for its smell to meet her. EWALD. LUCRETIUS speaks of lovers perfuming the doors of their mistresses. Some, on the other hand, view the perfume as having been brought by the Bride herself. So WORDSWORTH. SANCTIUS: Not having time to perfume her garments, she pours the myrrh on her hand, wishing thus to receive and gratify her Bridegroom. FAUSSET: Anointed herself profusely, as the best proof she could give him of a hearty welcome. WEISS: Just having gone to anoint herself as a delicate lady among the Romans. PATRICK and PERCY: Having taken it to anoint her husband's head with it, she in her haste spilt it on her hands. A. CLARKE: Those who brought the Bride to the Bridegroom's house often anointed the doorposts with fragrant oils, and sometimes the Bride herself anointed them: hence *uxor*, for *unxor*. Allegorized by the Fathers generally as indicating penitence, chastity, and mortification of the flesh. DURHAM: Lively exercise of faith and other graces. AINSWORTH: Godly sorrow, faith, and love; or the sweet alluring odour left by Christ. PATRICK: Most ardent love with which the believer seeks to entertain his Saviour. BRIGHTMAN: Her endeavours as most acceptable to God. DEL RIO: The Bridegroom moving his Church to undertake the work of preaching the Gospel with the desire to endure hardship and even death for His sake. COCCEIUS: The Church's begun labour that she and the brethren might be partakers of Christ. DAVIDSON: The application to the Church of all the efficacy of Christ's atonement and resurrection, symbolized by the myrrh with which His body was embalmed, and which flows from Him as the Head to His members. *Threefold Mystery:* The setting forth anew of the precious doctrines of the atonement and mediation of Christ. M. STUART: Historically, the reference to the disciples with myrrh seeking Jesus in the tomb. FAUSSET: Also, to bitter repentance as the fruit of the Spirit's anointing (2 Cor. i. 21. 22).

VERSE 6. '*My soul failed when He spake.*' 'My soul failed.' נַפְשִׁי יָצְאָה *naphshi yatseah*, literally, 'went forth.' Failed, or fainted; breath forsook me; my soul almost went out of me. ZÖCKLER, EWALD, DELITZSCH. Sunk. BURROUGHS. I swooned away, and was like a dead body (Gen. xxxv. 18). FRY. I was not in my senses. DE WETTE, NOYES, SANCTIUS. My soul melted with anguish. ROWE. With sweet effusion of love. FROMONDI. Left me and flew away to my Bridegroom. DEL RIO. Was in great terror. COCCEIUS. Was in suspense. THEODORET. There remained no more spirit in her. DAVIDSON. VULGATE: My soul was melted. LUTHER: Went out. MARTIN: Fainted. DIODATI: I was out of myself. COVERDALE and MATTHEWS: My heart could not refrain. TIGURINE: My mind was disturbed. 'When he spake.' בְּדַבְּרוֹ *bedhabbero*, 'at his speaking;' from דָּבַר *dibber*, to speak. So GESENIUS. When he spoke. EWALD, DELITZSCH. While he yet spoke. WEISS, MERCER, LE CLERC, &c. When he was speaking, *i.e.*, through the window. ZOCKLER. Had failed as he spoke; a supplementary remark DOPKE. SEPTUAGINT: At his word. VULGATE: When he

spoke. SYMMACHUS: While he spoke. WICKLIFF: As he spake COVERDALE and MATTHEWS: Now like as aforetime when he spake. LUTHER: After his word. DUTCH: On account of his word. MARTIN: From having heard him speak. RASHI: When he spoke this word. JUNIUS: On account of the word with which he addressed me. *Assembly's Annotations*: My neglect of his speech troubled me when he was gone. BRIGHTMAN, AINSWORTH. BOOTHROYD: On remembering his words. BURROUGHS: In consequence of what he had said. SCOTT: Either remembering his tender and affectionate apeal, or hearing a reproving word as he withdrew. NOYES and DE WETTE: I was not in my senses while he spoke—acted insanely in not admitting my beloved at his request. EWALD proposes to read בְּדָבְרוֹ 'at his going away. HITZIG views the word as equivalent to אַחֲרָיו 'after him.' UMBREIT: 'In order to follow him; from דָּבַר to follow. Some propose בְּדָבְרוֹ 'on his account.'

CHAPTER VII.

VERSE 12. *Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.*

The speaker in this and the preceding verse differently understood by expositors. According to many, the Bridegroom is the Speaker. Among the moderns, HAHN observes: The King had gone down to enjoy the beauty of spring in his native plains, after the virgin's refusal. KITTO: Had gone down to his garden to admire its beauty. J. H. MICHAELIS: Bridegroom relates his joyful doing and saying. A large portion of interpreters view the *Bride* as the speaker. THEODORET: Bride gives the reason for her not obeying the Bridegroom's call. DELITZSCH: Bride relates where she had been. EWALD: Begins to relate how she had been surprised by the royal *cortége* while in her garden, and what happened to her on her first being brought to the King's Court. ZOCKLER: Describes how she had been occupied before being brought to the royal Court, and how that had taken place. PERCY, GOOD, and BOOTHROYD: Spoken by the Bride, who had gone to meet her spouse. M. STUART: The Bride always the narrator in the Song. Some expositors, however, view the Bridegroom as the Speaker in the preceding verse, and the Bride in this.

'Or ever I was aware,' לֹא יָדַעְתִּי *lo yadha'ti*; literally, I knew not. GESENIUS: I observed or expected not; יָדַע used also of *observing*. ZÖCKLER: 'I knew not;' viz., that her lover was the King. DELITZSCH: That my soul exalted me,' &c. EWALD: 'That my pleasure brought me,' &c., *i.e.*, it happened without my knowing it. 'My soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib' (שָׂמַתְנִי מַרְכְּבוֹת עַמִּי־נָדִיב *samathni markebhoth ammi-nadhibh*) A construction like Psalm cxxxiv. 2, and Ezekiel xvii 5. Perhaps מַרְכְּבוֹת for בְּמַרְכְּבוֹת, as 1 Samuel viii. 11. Most of the MSS. read עַמִּי נָדִיב as two words (*ammi nadib i.e*, my willing people); though upwards of twenty read as one, like the Septuagint and Vulgate. According to GESENIUS, עַמִּי is the construct state of עַם with *Yod* annexed, but not as the pronominal suffix, *my*. EWALD, however, reads with the suffix, — my people, *i.e.*, the people to which I belong. GESENIUS understands the noun as denoting friends or company (from עָמַם to collect); and נָדִיב as another noun, 'the prince;' from נָדַב 'to impel;' hithpael, 'to offer oneself willingly;' hence נדיב ready, prompt liberal, princely; and as a noun, a prince the expression in the text denoting 'the Prince's people or company.' NOYES: The prince's train. M STUART: the attendants of the prince. ZOCKLER: Expresses the full display of the pomp and power of the kingdom. According to others, the two words are united in the proper name of a person celebrated for his swift chariots. So MERCER, GROTIUS, PATRICK and others: some noted captain, who easily pursued his victories with the swiftest chariots HARMER: a furious driver of the age; the expression indicating the greatest precipitation. According to some Latin writers, Amminadib, the father of Naasson. For שָׂמַתְנִי Döderlein reads עַמַּתְנִי 'made me amazed;' apparently the reading of the Vulgate, which has: My soul disturbed me on account of the four-horsed chariots of Amminadib. Similarly, SYMMACHUS: I was in perplexity for, &c. The SEPTUAGINT has: My soul knew not (reading יָדַעַת) he (or it) made me, &c. WICKLIFF and

the DOUAI Version follow the Vulgate: My soul disturbed or troubled me for, &c. CRANMER and the BISHOP'S BIBLE: I knew not that my soul had made me the chariots of the people that be under tribute. GENEVA VERSION: I knew nothing; my soul set me as the chariots of my noble people. COVERDALE and MATTHEWS: Then the chariots of the proud of my people made me suddenly afraid. LUTHER: My soul knew it not, that he had set or made me the chariots of Amminadib. DIODATI: I was not aware that my desire rendered me like the chariots of A. MARTIN: I did not perceive myself, that my affection rendered me like the chariots of A. DUTCH: Before I knew it, my soul set me on the chariots of my willing people. CASTALIO: My soul rendered me unawares like, &c. MERCER: I knew not, my soul made or placed me the chariots, &c PAGNINUS and BRIGHTMAN: As the chariots, &c. MUNSTER: To be the chariots, &c. PISCATOR, JUNIUS, and TREMELLIUS: When I perceived not this, viz.: that the vines were budding, &c. AINSWORTH: My soul set me, *i.e.*, I put myself, &c.; the language of earnest desire and affection, as Ecclesiastes vii. 28; Canticles i. 7. DURHAM: I was made like, or, I was set on the chariots. &c. *Editor of* CALMET: My affections transported me like, &c. J. H. MICHAELIS: I knew not how, my soul placed me on, &c. PERCY, GOOD, BOOTHROYD: I knew not the irresolution of my mind, which made me withdraw swift as the chariots, &c. DEL RIO: I perceived not [thy love to me, because] my mind disturbed me on account of, &c. ROSENMULLER: Made me like, *i.e.*, swift as the chariots, &c. HOLDEN: Before I was aware, my soul hurried me away with anxious thoughts of my beloved. FRY: My heart made me like, &c. SANCTIUS: So courageous in following after the missing Bridegroom. UMBREIT: Made me into a chariot of, &c., *i.e.*, a princess. GESENIUS, HITZIG, EWALD: Transported me; made me happy among the chariots, &c. HODGSON: My fancy conceived myself on the chariots, &c. MERCER explains: Unawares an incredible desire impelled me to go to the garden where my beloved was; and I went with such speed that I did not perceive I was like, &c. JUNIUS and PISCATOR: Not seeing the Bride ready for the marriage, I took speedy counsel what I should do for her until that time. VATABLUS: I used the quickest carriages, those used by prince; so quickly did I return to my Bridegroom. SANCTIUS: I knew not that the Bridegroom had gone down to the garden; my soul disturbed me for the chariots, &c., lest I should meet them; or lest I should not be permitted to ascend them. PATRICK: I did not know it, or think so,—was not conscious of such perfections: thy praises put such motions in my soul as to make me to aim at the highest perfection, and use all haste to its attainment. DURHAM: I knew not till I was transported with an irresistible power of love to my Bridegroom. A. CLARKE: Implies strong agitation of mind, palpitation of heart. FRY: Describes the fluttering of fear, being taken by surprise and driven to flight. PERCY: Expresses a heart palpitating between love, bashfulness, fear, and other tender passions; the meeting probably by appointment. FRY: I was not aware,—her retirement being suddenly interrupted. GESENIUS: Suddenly, while walking in the garden, I unexpectedly saw myself surrounded with the chariots of the king's companions. WILLIAMS: The affection of the prince carried him to meet his Bride with the rapidity of a chariot of A. KITTO: Solomon unexpectedly sees Shulamite. CLAY: His soul bounds towards her in swift affection as she now makes her appearance in the garden. DELITZSCH: I knew not that my soul exalted me, &c.; it was not by self-exaltation, but by the impulse of her own love,—not forgetful of her humble origin. M. STUART: Expresses her ignorance as to where he was, and her diligence in seeking him; her great haste from the strength of her affection, or her courage and resolution in surmounting all difficulties for his sake. ZOCKLER: Indicates sudden elevation to royal dignity, and her desire to be wholly his.

The passage variously allegorized. TARGUM. The Lord consults with Himself for the good of Israel. RASHI: Israel complains of the consequence of her sin in falling under the power of Rome. THEODORET: The Church complains of the heathen whom she sought to evangelize, but who attacked her and became as Satan's chariot. AMBROSE: The soul's subjection to the four passions till Christ mounts the chariot. DEL RIO: The Jews converted in the latter days excuse their long continuance in blindness and obstinancy. BRIGHTMAN: The conversion of the Jews as a thing beyond all expectation, and the ready aid given by the Gentiles in their restoration (Isa. lxvi. 20) GREGORY and many of the Latins view the chariot as that of Christ, drawn by the four evangelists. COCCEIUS sees in the passage a prophetic reference to the warlike expeditions of the Hussites under Ziska; Christ's pity for His oppressed people, and his ready assistance to their endeavours. AINSWORTH observes, that Christ uses His servants as chariots, for this 'willing people' to be brought as an oblation to the Lord. (Isa

lxvi. 20). GILL sees in the passage the swiftness as well as the majesty and glory with with which Christ visits His Church: not finding the plants as He expected, He speedily employs methods for making them so: or, He returns with a transport of love to His Church. *Bride of Christ*: Christ in viewing the plants planted by His Father, is filled with the joy of one who finds himself suddenly surrounded with His willing people. HAWKER: The Bride conscious of the effect of Christ's visit to her, her soul being suddenly and blessedly on fire. M. STUART: The Bride suddenly transported with desire to return to her Lord and King. J. H. MICHAELIS: Christ speaks after the manner of men, as if not expecting such an event, or not knowing what to do. So CALOVIUS and COCCEIUS. DAVIDSON: Christ takes His willing people, as it were, in the chariots of His commands, and brings them to Mount Zion, the Christian Church. THRUPP: The Church unexpectedly made the source and channel of victorious might to all the willing people of God. HAHN: The Gospel in its fourfold history carried rapidly through the world; and, without thinking a moment longer, constrained by the long restrained love of His heart, Christ mounts, as Captain of the Host, the chariots of His people, to bring the penitent to Himself, and to fulfil His vocation, as Israel's King, in bringing back conquered Heathendom into the tents of Shem.

VERSE 13. *Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return.* 'Return.' שׁוּבִי *shubhi*, return, come back. So most; though some, as DE WETTE, HAHN, and SANDERS render it, 'turn round,' for which a different word would probably be used. Spoken by Solomon and his female attendants. EWALD. By bride's companions, who desire her to return back to the garden with them. DELITZSCH. By the bridegroom's servants. THEODORET. By his friends. HOUBIGANT, PERCY. By chorus of women. MENOCHIUS. The Bride, finding her beloved, takes leave of the women, who call her to return. MERCER. GILL: Observing her bashfulness, they call her to turn her face, that they may behold it. HARMER: Spoken by Solomon or his attendants to the Jewish Queen, who had fled as not able to bear an interview with the King. SANCTIUS: Spoken by the 'daughters of Jerusalem,' desiring to see her beauty for themselves. M. STUART: By the 'daughters,' desiring in the King's absence to see the Bride. WEISS: By first division of the 'daughters.' FRY: by the company who had broken in upon her retirement, while she turned away to conceal herself. NOYES: By the court ladies. ZÖCKLER: The ladies calling to her when appearing to leave the court. HAHN: The call of the King and his host out of the chariots to the virgin in her home which they have speedily reached. WILLIAMS: Seeing her at a distance, the king instantly turns back and flies to meet her. Thus allegorized. TARGUM: The Lord calls Jerusalem to receive His prophets. RASHI: To return to Himself. THEODORET: Christ's servants call to the Church, not to fear the attacks of persecutors. PHILO, TRES PATRES: Call to the imperfect to repent. AMBROSE: To return to the way of virtue and of heaven. BERNARD: Bridegroom calls to the Church to return from lukewarmness, torpor and pride—from foolish joy and useless grief. DEL RIO: The call of the Christian Church addressed to the latter day Jews in the four quarters of the world. HAHN: The call of the Gospel of peace to the heathen world. WORDSWORTH: The summons reiterated, as addressed to Jew and Gentile to return to God. THRUPP: Call to the Church to return in peace from victorious conflict. HAWKER: The call of the Triune Jehovah. 'Shulamite.' הַשּׁוּלַמִּית *ha-Shulammith*. Different meanings and derivations of the name given. Probably named from Solomon. שְׁלֹמֹה *Shelomo*; 'she who is Solomon's Bride;' or, 'she who has been visited with peace.' GESENIUS. The Bepeaced. THRUPP. A dialectic variation of *Shunemite*, from Shunem, also called Solam, the place of her abode. ZÖCKLER. Shunem called Solam as early as the time of Eusebius, who refers to 1 Kings i. 3; ii. 17, as a possible explanation of the term. GESENIUS. Inhabitant of Salem or Jerusalem. ABEN EZRA, KIMCHI, COCCEIUS, PATRICK, &c. From שָׁלֵם perfect, or שָׁלַם to restore; the perfect or restored one. WEISS. Perfect in thy faithfulness. RASHI. SEPTUAGINT: Sunamite; though the Complutensian and Royal Editions have Sulamite. VULGATE, SYRIAC, and ARABIC: Sulamite. AQUILA: She who is at peace. WICKLIFFE: Sunamytis. The name here used to remind her of her condition as Solomon's bride, and so to remove her bashfulness. PERCY.

Ibid. As it were the company of two armies. The answer given by the Bridegroom. So THEODORET and the Fathers. By his friends. CALVIN. By the 'daughters.' ZÖCKLER and many moderns. A continuation of the Virgin's question. DE WETTE and others. 'As it were the company,' &c. כִּמְחֹלַת מַחֲנָיִם (*kimkholath mahanaim*). מְחֹלָה (*mekholah*) a choir or dance, to celebrate a victory; from חוּל, to turn or go round, to dance. GESENIUS. מָחוֹל (*makhul*)

always a religious dance, or dance at a religious festival (Exod. xv. 20; Jud. xxi. 19; Jer. xxxi. 4, 13). Ewald. מְחוֹל, a circular dance, well known and common to the Orientals in feasts and solemn occasions, performed by several companies at once and by ranks, moving in opposite directions; performed anciently round heathen idols. Weiss. מְחֹלָה, like מָחוֹל, a chorus or dance; processions or bands constantly employed on occasions of public rejoicing. Fry. מַחֲנַיִם (*mahanaim*); dual or plural of מַחֲנֶה, a camp or army; from חָנָה, to pitch tent: here, according to some, the heavenly hosts or angels. So Gesenius and Delitzsch. Two hosts or choral bands. Percy, Good. Two bands; alluding probably to the two choruses or semi-chorusses that accompanied the Bride and Bridegroom. Williams. Two camps. A. Clarke. Simply, Mahanaim: 'The dance of Mahanaim.' Zöckler. What resembles the dance of M.: they would see her dance. Ewald, who observes: Mahanaim was an old city on the other side of Jordan celebrated in Jacob's time (Gen. xxxii. 3): must have become in the poet's time celebrated for its female dancers at the solemn religious festivals, having been a holy city from antiquity through Jacob's abode in it: hence such dances, as at Shiloh (Jud. xxi. 19), in the Kingdom of Israel, at first only at Dan and Beersheba (1 King xii. 28, 29), afterwards in in many other cities (Amos iv. 4; v. 5). These remarks, however, made on the supposition that the Song was composed by a later poet than Solomon. The Septuagint has: As choruses or dances of the camps. Vulgate: Unless the choruses of camps. Wickliff: But quires of tents. Douai: The dance of the angelic choirs. Luther: As the ranks at Mahanaim. Dutch: A row of two armies. Diodati and Martin: As a dance of two companies. Vatablus, Pagninus, Mercer, &c.: As the chorus of a camp or camps. Junius and Tremellius: The quire of Mahanaim. Brightman: What but as the company of an army. Sanctius: Indicates sweetest pleasure, whether it be a chorus of dancers or instrumental music. Refers to the songs or praises of warriors. Rupert. Singing a triumph as conquerors. Theodoret. As it were the meeting or conflict of two hosts. Percy. Rather the amiable junction of two friendly companies as in a dance. Harmer. The rushing together after the manner of dancers. Good. The squadrons of two hosts dazzling by their armour, and performing their evolutions with the greatest order and beauty. Boothroyd, Cobbin. Indicates the stateliness and majesty of two armies in battle array. Gill. Allegorically: In the Church is both warfare and festivity, choirs and camps; fighting first and singing afterwards. Theodoret. Indicates the glorious presence of God in the Christian Church, resembling what Jacob saw at Mahanaim, or in the hosts of heaven. Patrick. The deliverance of Shulamite from her miseries, and the joy of men and angels for her victory. Ainsworth. The union of Jews and Gentile; or rather, the conflict between the flesh and the spirit in a believer. Gill. Indicates only a certain terrible and wonderful majesty. Mercer. The Church's excellence. Durham. A band of two camps united under one leader: seen in the desire of Luther and others in regard to the Bohemians in 1522. Cocceius. Points to the time when the Beloved shall be as an ensign to the nations, and the two armies of Jews and Gentiles shall be united. Weiss. Something as magnificent and transporting as the dance of the angel bands at Mahanaim; the sight of Shulamite one of angelic beauty and heavenly sublimity. Zöckler.

CHAPTER VII.

Verse 5: *The King is held in the galleries.* 'In the galleries.' בָּרְהָטִים (*ba-rehatim*), plural of רַהַט, a gutter, rafter, gallery, a hair or ringlet; from רָהַט, an unused root, like the Aramaic רְהַט to run or flow. Here, according to most moderns, a ringlet or lock. A king is fettered in the locks Ewald, De Wette, Delitzsch Her locks or curls viewed as nets or snares. Zöckler. The king is held captive in the flowing ringlets. Good. Captivated by the locks. Noyes. According to other interpreters, the word is used in the sense of 'galleries' or 'corridors,' that run along the sides of a house, or pass from one chamber to another. Places to walk in. Junius, Piscator. So the Septuagint: A king is bound in the galleries (παραδορομαις), Dutch version: The king is as bound on the galleries. Munster: Bound to the galleries to contemplate thee. Junius: Any king would thus be held in the galleries. According to others, the word here denotes beams or rafters. Mercer: Is bound as it were to the beams of the house to look at thee. Vatablus: Bound to the beams of his own

house for excessive love. Some connect the word מֶלֶךְ (*melek*), a king, with the last word in the preceding verse, 'the purple of a king,' or royal purple, and thus understand בִּרְהָטִים of the 'gutters,' or canals used by dyers for dying the purple. So the VULGATE. The purple of a king bound in the canals. WICKLIFF and DOUAI VERSION. Joined or tied to water-pipes. So ABEN EZRA, LEO JUDA, GOGUET, &c. Others, following the same construction, translate 'plaits or folds.' COVERDALE and MATTHEWS. The purple of a king folden up in plaits. LUTHER. Bound in folds. DIODATI, giving the meaning of 'rafters.' Attached to scaffolds. HOUBIGANT. Royal purple hanging in a knot from the ceiling. FRY. Bound on the rafters: allusion to some rich canopy of state suspended from the roof of the palace. THRUPP. Like royal purple fixed among the wainscottings. SANCTIUS gives a different meaning to בִּרְהָטִים—gold or silver headbands. So MICHAELIS. As the king encircled with a straight turban. Thus allegorized: RASHI. The King—God himself—is bound by the love and obedience of His people. ABEN EZRA and ALSHECH. The King—Messiah—born, according to ancient Rabbies, on the day Jerusalem was destroyed. RUPERT: The Saviour's passion, the more glorious the longer it was preceded by typical sacrifices. AINSWORTH and GILL. Christ the King abruptly breaks off in His description of the Church's beauty, to discover to her His love and affection. DAVIDSON and WORDSWORTH. The Church's King dispenses His grace through the appointed channels,—the ordinances of the Gospel, and the Scriptures of truth. HAHN. The love of the King and his people gained by the beauty of Shulamite's humility and poverty of spirit.

VERSE 9. *And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.* 'For my beloved,' לְדוֹדִי *le-dhodhi*. Understood by ABEN EZRA, SANCTIUS, and many moderns, as a sudden interruption by the Bride. So ROSENMÜLLER, DELITZSCH, NOYES, &c. Spoken by the Bride, who takes up the king's words to continue the description, shewing that she fully responded to his love. ZÖCKLER. Viewed by many as spoken, like the preceding, by the virgin-attendants, one speaking in the name of the rest, or the whole choir considered as one person. M. STUART. The virgins viewed, like the Bride, as both one and many, and claiming the Bride's beloved for their own. So MERCER, AINSWORTH, and others. DURHAM. 'For my special friends;' or as personating the Bride in an abrupt expression of her love to the Bridegroom. Some, like the SEPTUAGINT, connect the expression with הוֹלֵךְ (*holech*) 'that goeth,' and either translate 'that goeth pleasantly,' as PISCATOR, JUNIUS and TREMELLIUS, PERCY, and BOOTHROYD; or, 'that goeth towards my beloved,' or, 'that goeth down for my beloved,' as DE WETTE, HAHN, and others; or, 'for my friends;' or, 'sent to those whom I love;' as PATRICK and WILLIAMS. EWALD would put the word in brackets, as probably an error of the transcribers, but long before the Masorites, as only wanting in one of Kennicot's MSS. (715), and that, perhaps, by oversight. HOUBIGANT conjectures לְחִכִּי 'to my palate,' as the original word. GLASSIUS supposes it to be used euphonically for לְדוֹדִים as chap. viii. 2; 2 Kings, xi. 19. SEPTUAGINT. That goeth to my beloved. VULGATE. Worthy of my beloved to drink. So WICKLIFFE and the DOUAI VERSION. LUTHER. That enters my beloved. MARTIN. In favour of my beloved DIODATI. Which goes to my friend. DUTCH VERSION. To my beloved ones.

'That goeth down sweetly,' הוֹלֵךְ לְמֵישָׁרִים (לְדוֹדִי) *holech* (*le-dhodhi*) *le-mesharim*. Literally: 'That goeth to or for my beloved, to or in straightness, or straightly.' מֵישָׁר the plural of מֵישָׁרִים (*mesh'ar*) straight; with the prefix לְ to or for,—straightly or directly. So GESENIUS and EWALD. Smoothly, or 'according to evenness.' ZÖCKLER and DE WETTE. Smoothly, that is, pleasantly. WEISS. That goeth to him directly and ultroneously, as entirely belonging to him. SANCTIUS Some connect לְמֵישָׁרִים, not with הוֹלֵךְ, but with לְדוֹדִי 'those whom I love for their uprightness.' So WILLIAMS. Or, 'whom I love uprightly,' *i.e.*, from the heart. So RASHI. SEPTUAGINT: Going to my beloved straightly (εἰς εὐθύτητα). VULGATE, perhaps reading לְמִשְׁתִּים: Worthy for my beloved to drink. LUTHER. Which enters my beloved smoothly. DIODATI. Which goes directly to my friend. CRANMER and GENEVA BIBLE. Which goeth straight to my well-beloved. DUTCH. Which goeth right to my beloved ones. MONTANUS and MERCER. Carrying itself rightly. MUNSTER. Going by straight ways. PAGNINUS

Going directly. JUNIUS and TREMELLIUS. Most rightly. COCCEIUS. Flowing to my beloved most smoothly. AINSWORTH. So delicious that it goes down glibly. FRY. Moving to my beloved as it ought; indicating the Bride's desire that her conversation should be agreeable to her husband. WEISS. Like the choice wine poured on the altar of burnt offering, which mounts directly to heaven. DAVIDSON supplies a copula, and translates: For my beloved, and for the upright ones. THEODORET. using the Septuagint: For direction to the souls that love thee.

'Causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.' דֹּבֵב *dobhebh*, from דָּבַב, to which the Talmudists give the meaning of speaking; 'making the lips of those who sleep to speak,' *i.e.*, in dreams. So MERCER, HENSTENBERG, DELITZSCH, &c. WILLIAMS. Causing to murmur. WEISS. To lisp. SANCTIUS. Inducing intoxication, and making the stammerers eloquent. PATRICK. Making men speak with the lips of the ancient, *i.e.* to utter excellent savings. A. CLARKE. As wine causes the most backward to speak, so thy charms make the most taciturn eloquent in thy praise. FRY: Effervescing against the lips, &c. Others, however, give to דָּבַב the meaning of 'to creep or flow over.' So EWALD, GESENIUS, DE WETTE, &c. 'Gliding over the lips of sleepers' that is, he who drinks is insensibly overtaken with sleep; the adjective being taken, as frequently, from the *effect*. ZÖCKLER. EWALD, NOYES. Flowing down. PERCY. 'Those that are asleep' יְשֵׁנִים *yeshenim*, may be either 'persons sleeping,' or 'old men;' the former preferable, as from יָשֵׁן to sleep. So GESENIUS and most. HAHN. Persons already sinking into slumber, as if, overcome by the sweetness of the wine, they were unable to remove the cup again from their lips. Some understand it figuratively of the dead. PATRICK. 'Old men;' those asleep or dead, or at the point of death. SEPTUAGINT, reading ושנים and שפתי: Reaching my lips and teeth VULGATE. Suitable for the lips and teeth to ruminate. So WICKLIFF BISHOP'S, and DOUAI VERSION. COVERDALE and MATTHEWS. The lips and teeth shall have their pleasure. CRANMER. Which bursteth forth from the lips of the ancient Elders. DUTCH, DIODATI, and MARTIN. Making the lips of the sleepers to speak. LUTHER. And speaks of what is afar off. MERCER. Awakening the slumbering senses, and refreshing the mind. VATABLUS. Who (viz., the friend who drinks it) speaks with the lips of them that sleep. CASTALIO: To my friend who (in consequence) babbles with sleeping lips. TARGUM, allegorizing. As Elisha and Elijah raised the dead, and as Ezekiel prophesied, and awoke the dead in the valley of Dura RASHI. Even my fathers in the grave shall rejoice and give praise for their portion. RABBINS. Causing, by the Spirit, given in answer to the Church's intercession, the lips of the nations who were asleep before to be opened, and to show forth the praises of the Lord. WEISS. Perhaps an allusion to the Israelites expecting silently the prayer made by the priests in the Temple, or by the leader in the synagogue, when the lips only moved: the daughters of Jerusalem thus intimating that, while the Church was requested to offer fervent prayer in their behalf, they would silently repeat it after her. AINSWORTH. Sinners awakened and quickened by the word preached (Eph. v. 14); also others who from negligence fell asleep, and are enabled by this spiritual wine to speak (Isa. lvii. 13, 19).

VERSE 13. *The mandrakes give a smell.*

'Mandrakes.' דּוּדָאִים *ha-dudhaim*; plural of דּוּדִי a love-apple, from דּוּד to love. So GESENIUS and others. 'A mandragora (*Atropa mandragora, Linnæus*); a plant with large leaves, like the beet; its root like that of a turnip, divided in the lower part, and somewhat resembling the human form; employed in preparing love philtres, as having a soporific power, and thought to possess a virtue in matters of love, which is still ascribed to it in the East.' A wild plant common in Palestine, especially in Galilee; of the same genus as the Belladonna, with small whitish blossoms, which, in May or June become small yellow apples, with a strong and disagreeable odour; very early regarded as an artificial provocative of sensual love, not only in the East, but also by the Greeks and Romans, and still called by the Arabs *tuffáh esh-shaitan*, or Satan's apples. ZÖCKLER, EWALD. According to others, a particular kind of melon called in the east, from its shape, *chamama*, or Woman's breast, corresponding to the Hebrew name in the text. So CALMET and FRY. TAYLOR. Some lovely fruit or flower. DE WETTE. Some beautiful sweet-smelling plant. COBBIN. A kind of highly-flavoured melon. Some read דּוּדָאִים *dudhaim*, 'baskets' (as Jer xxiv. 1). So HAHN: Baskets full of all kinds of precious fruits According to to the Talmudists: Violets or lilies. RASHI. The Jasmine. TARGUM. The Balsam. SEPTUAGINT and VULGATE Mandragora. LUTHER. Lilies. According to others, as Ludolf and Simon, the Indian Fig. Patrick and others needlessly object to the man-

drake, as having an offensive smell. 'Give a smell,'—give forth their odour; therefore referring to the fruit, not the blossoms, nor the plant; and so looking forward to a more advanced season than in verse 13, the fruit not being ripe till the wheat harvest' (Gen. xxx. 14. ZÖCKLER.

CHAPTER VIII.

VERSE 5. *I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought thee forth that bare thee.*

'I raised thee up,' עוֹרַרְתִּיךָ *'orarticha*, Pilel of עוּר, to be awake; literally, I awaked thee out of sleep; according to many moderns, here applied to awakening the previously slumbering affections. So ZÖCKLER. I incited thee [to love]; discovering mine to thee, I obtained thine. GESENIUS. I inspired thee with love; properly, aroused thee. DE WETTE, BOOTHROYD. Excited thee to love. WILLIAMS. Wooed thee. PERCY, GOOD. FRY: Raised thee up; perhaps, resuscitated thee,—the Bride originally found by her husband an exposed infant (Ezek. xvi. 3–6). The Masoretic pointing in our Hebrew Bibles probably in this case faulty, as determining the speaker to be the Bride instead of the Bridegroom, to whom the words appear much more naturally to belong, and to whom they are ascribed by all the Greek Fathers, and many of the Latins. 'Under the apple-tree.' Under this apple-tree,—pointing to it; one immediately adjoining her mother's house, and probably shading one of the windows. ZÖCKLER. This apple-tree one among many other places recalling their first love-intercourse. DELITZSCH. Reminding her of their first interview. BOOTHROYD. Referring to the place of her birth. SANDERS. In the woods, as rustic and poor. SANCTIUS. Reminding her of her humble origin. FRY. Refers to the scene in chap. ii. 3. WILLIAMS. SEPTUAGINT, and VULGATE: Under an apple-tree I awoke thee up (ἐξήγειρα). COVERDALE and MATTHEWS: I am the same that awakened thee up among the apple-trees. EWALD prefers adhering to the Masoretic pointing, and understands by the apple-tree the place where the Bride sometimes awoke the Bridegroom when resting at mid-day, and which had seen him born.—'There she brought thee forth that bare thee.' חִבְּלָתְךָ *khibbelathecha*; Piel of חָבַל, to bend, twist; hence Piel, to bring forth with pain. So GESENIUS and most. There, where that apple-tree stands, or the dwelling shaded by it, she travailed with thee. ZÖCKLER. Others, however, understand the verb as from חָבַל to plight, as Exodus xxii. 26; Deuteronomy xxiv. 6, 17; 'pledged or contracted thee to me.' So HOUBIGANT, MICHAELIS, A. CLARKE, GOOD, BOOTHROYD, &c. DELITZSCH. Under the same tree, Shulamite received from her mother her life, from Solomon his love. WILLIAMS. Reference to the scene in chap. ii. 3, where we may suppose the Bride's mother to have been present, and some ceremony here alluded to to have taken place. PERCY. Bridegroom makes a solemn recapitulation of the contract they had entered into. SEPTUAGINT. There thy mother travailed with thee (ὠδίνησέ σε). VULGATE, using a different reading: Was corrupted. Followed by the DOUAI version. COVERDALE. Bare thee. So LUTHER, DIODATI, MARTIN, and the DUTCH version. PAGNINUS. Conceived thee. PISCATOR, JUNIUS, and TREMELLIUS: Was in labour with thee. Allegorically:—WICKLIFFE. 'The voice of Christ to the synagogue; of the holy cross. DOUAI. Christ redeemed the Gentiles at the foot of the cross. MATTHEWS. Voice of the Spouse before the spouseless. DEL RIO. Bridegroom relates that the beginning and increase of his love to his beloved had manifested itself under the apple-tree; reminding her of her original misery and poverty, in order to keep her from pride and elation. FROMONDI. I raised thee up when dead under the forbidden tree, by sprinkling thee with the blood of my cross; that as death reigned by one tree, he might be conquered by another. SANCTIUS. I raised thee up when abandoned by thy mother to perish (Ezekiel xvi. 3—6). DAVIDSON. Raised thee up after the fall; or, by the preaching of the Gospel. WEISS. I, the risen Saviour, aroused thee under the apple or citron tree; the cross, where the sleeping Church was aroused; for example, John, Joseph, Nicodemus, the thief, &c. GILL. The apple-tree Christ Himself, or the ordinances of the Gospel. RASHI, following the Rabbinical pointing. The Bride seeks to stir up the love of her Beloved. COCCEIUS. The Bride arouses Christ by her prayers in time of trouble and persecution, as the disciples did in the storm. J. H. MICHAELIS Arouses Him by earnest prayer to shew Himself more than formerly. AINSWORTH. Taking hold of the covenant of

grace and the promises of life in Christ, the apple-tree of life and grace (chap. ii. 3), she stirred Him up by prayer for her help and comfort. GILL: Not finding Him in ordinances, she raised Him up by earnest prayer. FAUSSET: I excited thy comparsion to come and save me from my sin and misery under the apple-tree in Eden;—spoken by converted Israel as the type of the whole redeemed humanity. M. STUART: She reminds the king of his own outcast condition. HAHN: Pledges herself solemnly to the king for ever, and the king himself to her, in the cool shade of the apple-tree of the garden (chap. vi. 11); in his home-land in Canaan, her misery out in the open field moved his loving heart to sympathy. According to AMBROSE and others: The synagogue the Church's mother, who brought forth the Church, by shedding the blood of Christ through which she is born again. THEODORET: The grace of the Holy Spirit in connection with baptism. HONORIUS: The flesh of Eve or human nature. DURHAM: Believers the mother of Christ, as bringing forth His image in the souls of men, and so giving Him a being in their heart. AINSWORTH: By the preaching of the Gospel, attended with labour, sorrow, and difficulty. J. H. MICHAELIS: By doing the Father's will, and conceiving in themselves the image of Christ by a true faith. MERCER: When fleeing to Him for refuge. M. STUART: Refers to the time of sorrow or birth-pangs that preceded Christ's resurrection from the dead. HAHN: With pain His people brought Him forth to themselves as their King.

VERSE 6. *The coals thereof are coals of fire which hath a most vehement flame.* 'The coals thereof.' רְשָׁפֶיהָ *reshapheha*, plural of רֶשֶׁף resheph, a flame; from the unused root רָשַׁף to inflame or kindle. GESENIUS, ZÖCKLER. A blaze or flash of lightning. (Deut. xxxii. 24; Job v. 7; Hab. iii. 5) WEISS. EWALD derives rather from רשׁף to creep, creep forth; applied to the plague, and so the *heat* of the plague: hence, heat or flame in general. SEPTUAGINT: Its wings. VULGATE and AQUILA: Its lamps and torches. SYMMACHUS: its attacks. SYRIAC: Its sparks. LUTHER: Its flame or heat. DIODATI and MARTIN: Its burning coals. So the Rabbins, who make it like רֶצֶף *retseph*, a coal, and who are followed by PAGNINUS, MONTANUS, MERCER, PISCATOR, &c. MUNSTER has 'torches.' AINSWORTH: Burning coals or darts of love that pierce and enflame the heart. So PATRICK: Darts or arrows. PERCY prefers 'sparks.' SANCTIUS applies it to 'jealousy', which tortures like fire.—'Which hath a most vehement flame.' שַׁלְהֶבֶתְיָה *shalhebhethyah*, from לְהָבָה *lehabhah*, a 'flame' with ש 'which.' Another reading, the Recension of Ben Naphtali, divides it into two words, שַׁלְהֶבֶת יָהּ, *shalhebheth Yah*, 'the flame of Yah, or Jehovah.' EWALD thinks that probably both words were originally read, ('its flames are the flames of Jehovah,') and that one of them dropped out; and remarks that יָהּ for יהוה was seldom used before Solomon's time, its use having risen when the name of Jehovah began to be added as a surname; and that it occurs only once in the Pentateuch (Exodus xv. 2). ZÖCKLER, who translates, a 'blaze of Jehovah,' observes that this name of God is mentioned only in this passage of the Song, 'the radiant apex in the developement of its doctrinal and ethical contents.' According to ZÖCKLER, the flame not natural, but kindled and sustained by God Himself; love, and jealousy, its intense synonym, appearing here like a brightly blazing fire, sending forth a multitude of sparks or flames into men's hearts. So DELITZSCH: A flame of Jehovah, as kindled by Him, hence unquenchable. PATRICK: 'Fire of the flame of the Lord,' *i.e.*, mighty and exceedingly scorching. SIMON derives the word from the Chaldee or Syriac שׁלהב to burn; the ש servile marking the Shaphal species (GREEN). PARKHURST derives it from שׁל to loose, and להב a flame,—a dissolving fire WEISS, in like manner reading as one word, explains as 'a stream, volume or torrent of flame, as Ezekiel xx. 47; a conflagration of flames (Job xv. 30). PERCY: 'A flame of Jah,'—which Jehovah kindles in the clouds,—a most vehement flame (Job i. 16). WILLIAMS refers the expression to the sacrificial flame, which, according to Jewish tradition, no rain could extinguish. The SEPTUAGINT has simply: 'Its flames.' VULGATE: 'And of flames,' connecting with 'fire.' TARGUM: Like the coals of the fire of hell, which the Lord shall kindle at the last day. COVERDALE and MATTHEWS: A very flame of the Lord. GENEVA: A vehement flame. DUTCH: As a flame of the Lord. DIODATI: A very great flame. MARTIN: A very vehement flame. TIRGURINE: Which have been kindled by the flame of God. MERCER and MONTANUS: A flame of the Lord. JUNIUS and TREMELLIUS: A Divine flame. COCCEIUS: A flame of God,—bright and inextinguishable. PAGNINUS: A most vehement flame. GROTIUS: As a flame of God, *i.e.*, a whole burnt-offering. VATABLUS: As the

flame of Jah or God, *i.e*, most vehement. PISCATOR: Which Jehovah kindles; the genitive of Authorship. JUNIUS: The greatest flame, as being the Spirit's most powerful light, to endure for ever. AINSWORTH: The vehement consuming flame of the Lord; piercing and devouring lightning; the fire of His Spirit. PATRICK: Burning with a violent and inextinguishable heat; mightily moved by the Lord.

VERSE 9. *If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver: and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.* 'If she be a wall.' חוֹמָה *khomah*, from the unused root חָמָה *khamah*, to surround, defend, protect; a wall. Spoken of a chaste damsel, difficult of access. GESENIUS and EWALD. Inaccessible, unwilling to receive suitors, or to be married. NOYES. Invincible; if she offers firm and successful opposition to all immoral enticements. DELITZSCH. Firm in her love against all wiles. MENOCHIUS. Conveys the idea of the firm resistance that checks the first advance of foes. HIRZEL. Spoken by the King: If she be able as a strong wall to resist all attacks of others; the sister's fortune will depend entirely on herself. KAHN. Spoken by Shulamite's brothers, careful for the honour and purity of their little sister; or by the Bridegroom: If she be fortified against all stratagems. SANCTIUS. PATRICK. According to others: A wall adapted to rear and support a family. WILLIAMS. Implies that nothing was materially defective. FRY. Allegorically; TARGUM: If she (Israel) be established as a wall among the nations. RASHI: If she is strong in her faith and religion, so as to be before the nations as a wall of brass. GREGORY: Able to resist adversaries. DEL RIO: If firm and steadfast in my love and worship against the wiles of suitors and attacks of the wanton,—in allusion to the last times. MERCER and CALVIN: If she remain firm in the faith, in the truth and in the worship of God. COCCEIUS: If she stand firm on the true foundation. DURHAM: If she be joined to Christ. GILL: Built on a sure foundation; well walled. AINSWORTH: Strong and well grounded in the truth. PATRICK: Faithful and constant. WEISS: Converted and built up as the first wall in the temple of God; or those of her who shall prove a wall.

'We will build upon her a palace of silver.' טִירַת *tirath*, a tower, citadel, or palace; from the unused root טוּר (*tur*), to surround So GESENIUS. According to others, from טוּר, properly צוּר, to fasten, enclose. VATABLUS. טִירָה (*tirah*) a small but strong castle, tower, or bulwark. ZÖCKLER. A pinnacle or battlement crowning a wall. HITZIG, HEILIGSTADT. A palace. KIMCHI. Fair and goodly turrets. PATRICK. A fair and goodly building wont to be set on the walls of strong cities. AINSWORTH. A habitation. HENGSTENBERG. Splendid tokens of victory, marking the wall of proud fortresses. EWALD. SEPTUAGINT and VULGATE: Breastworks and bulwarks. LUTHER: Bulwarks. DUTCH BIBLE: Pinnacles. DIODATI and MARTIN: A palace. Figuratively: We will find for her an illustrious husband. GROTIUS, CALMET, A. CLARKE. Will provide for her a marriage. WILLIAMS. Will ask a high dowry for her. ROSENMÜLLER, DE WETTE. Bestow a handsome dowry on her future marriage. PERCY. Give her an ample fortune. BOOTHROYD. Improve her appearance, and ornament her person. FRY. Treat her in the most dignified manner. HARMER. Build her up and that in full glory. THRUPP. Will accord to her the freedom and honour due to her virgin purity and steadfastness. DELITZSCH. She shall be enriched and honoured. COBBIN. Allegorically; TARGUM: We will surround her (Israel) as with borders of silver, so that the nations shall not be able to rule over her. RASHI: We will be to her a strong city and a crown of beauty; and we will build for her the holy city and the chosen house. THEODORET: Silver towers or bulwarks—words resplendent with reason (Ps. xi. 7), whence we may assail the enemy. BEDE: Eloquent men converted to Christ and then employed as preachers of the Gospel. MERCER: We will add strength, and adorn her with gifts and graces. FROMONDI: Will strengthen her to resist adversaries. PISCATOR, AINSWORTH, DURHAM: We, *i.e*, the Trinity; or Christ and His people,—the former by His grace, the latter ministerially by the Word. COCCEIUS: We will endeavour that the Churches be adorned with a knowledge of the truth in its completeness and connection, and with a holiness corresponding to it. GILL. Will fortify her by ministers and ordinances; or, make her an habitation for God by His Spirit. CHALMERS: Let every good work in her be perfected: let us graft on her capabilities what may advance into a full-grown Christianity. WEISS: With her aid, we shall call in and build up the Gentiles on this first wall, this first Church built up in Jerusalem.

'If she be a door.' דֶּלֶת (*deleth*), a door, from דָּלָה (*dalah*), to hang: figuratively, a damsel easy of access. So GESENIUS. A door whose sanctity any one may violate. EWALD. A door open to all. TIRINUS. Easily tempted and overcome,—a gate passable to all. SANCTIUS. If she gives way,

BRIGHTMAN. Giving a ready reception to every suitor. NOYES. According to others: A door to keep safe what may be preserved in the house. THEODORET. If it be too weak or mean. PATRICK. In a low condition; only a door instead of a wall. GILL. Allegorically; RASHI: If she (Israel) be open to seducers. ABEN EZRA: Liable to turn aside to other lovers. DEL RIO: Open to the Lord alone, and to His grace. FROMONDI: The Church a door into eternal life. MERCER: A wall the stronger and more confirmed believers; a door, the weaker and those not yet confirmed in the faith. WEISS: Those undecided and doubting,—moving to and fro on the hinges of unbelief. AINSWORTH: If she go forward in the faith and practice of the Gospel, built up, according to Nehemiah (chap. iii.), with doors for the safeguard of the inhabitants. COCCEIUS, on the contrary: A door admitting uncertain opinions, by which the ungodly may creep into her communion. DURHAM: A door giving entrance to Christ by faith.

'We will enclose her with boards of cedar.' נָצוּר *natsur*, from צוּר, to press, enclose, restrain. GESENIUS. EWALD adds: With the additional idea of making unhappy. Will block or stop up. DELITZSCH. With boards or planks put on the inside to prevent it from turning and opening. ZÖCKLER. A door open to every one must be fastened with boards nailed to it. EWALD. Figuratively: We will keep her in strict confinement, so that access to her shall be difficult. NOYES. Will keep her in. BRIGHTMAN. Will take means to restrain and prevent her (Hos. ii. 7). ABEN EZRA. SANCTIUS. Her false freedom to be in that case limited. HAHN. We will so watch over that she shall be approachable to no seducer, and no courtier approachable to her. Will safely enclose her, so as not to be a mere thoroughfare. M. STUART. FAUSSET. According to others: We will render her firmer. MERCER. Fence her about. AINSWORTH. Further strengthen and adorn her. DURHAM. Provide for her in a manner suitable to her rank and circumstances. WILLIAMS. She shall be the graceful entrance to my favour and friendship. GOOD. Allegorically; THEODORET: We will give her rulers and pastors of the Church not liable to be corrupted. COCCEIUS: We will endeavour to fix and confirm her in doctrine and discipline. MERCER: Impart fresh grace to strengthen and adorn her. TIRINUS: The weak to be carefully strengthened, and occasion of falling removed. BRIGHTMAN: We will, by means of the civil magistrate, fortify and defend her against all foes, and make her to flourish. GILL: Will adorn her with grace here and glory hereafter. WEISS: Will plunge he into awful calamities (Isa. xxix. i. 4).

VERSE 11. *Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon.* בַּעַלְהָמוֹן, from בַּעַל *baal*, a lord, or according to some, a place; and הָמוֹן (*hamon*), a multitude, from הָמָה to make a noise; 'the lord or place of a multitude.' GESENIUS, from Judith viii. 3, thinks the place was in the Holy Land, and especially to be sought in Samaria. EWALD rather thinks it may be Hammon (Josh. xix. 28), in the tribe of Asher, in the most fruitful part of Palestine. ZOCKLER prefers the Belamon mentioned in Judith viii. 3, in the tribe of Issachar, a locality not very far from Shunem; and thinks it mentioned here by Shulamite as an instance, very near her home, of a royal property let out at a high rent, in order to illustrate by it her relation to the king, as well as to her brothers: 'A vineyard became Solomon's,' *i.e.*, he has it now,—not, he had it once. He thinks the name may have been derived from the Tyro-Egyptian god Ammon, who may have been worshipped there. MICHAELIS, after IKENIUS, thinks it another name for Baalbec. GILL: Perhaps Baalgad (Josh. xi. 17), in the valley of Lebanon. WEISS understands Jerusalem, a 'place of tumult or confusion' at the time referred to. SANCTIUS understands the name as denoting 'a place of many people,' *i.e.*, desired by such to have a possession in it—a rich and fertile district, the place where the vineyard which was Shulamite's dowry lay—the same as Engedi ABEN EZRA and GROTIUS think it a place not far from Jerusalem. The VULGATE reads: The Peaceable had a vineyard in her that has peoples. The ARABIC, WICKLIFF, and the DOUAI Version: In Jerusalem. Different views as to the reason of the introduction of the vineyard here. According to SANCTIUS, Shulamite means that she did not love her Bridegroom for the dowry he gave. The vineyard simply adduced by way of example. DELITZSCH, ZÖCKLER. Introduced for contrast with her own vineyard, namely, her beauty or person, for which she did not wish any pecuniary income. NOYES. Mentioned as an example of Solomon's riches, of which she may have heard; spoken only in the way of narrative, to be afterwards applied to herself. EWALD. A vineyard or estate of Solomon's, with which she compares one given to her by him for her residence. FRY. The vineyard which Shulamite had possessed in Baalhamon, but which now appertained to Solomon as the dowry she had brought him, and which she now wishes to be given to her younger sister. GOOD. The adult sister, as a newly-married bride, declares her estate, and

the diligence with which she would cultivate it for the benefit of her Bridegroom, comparing it with Solomon's in the same neighbourhood. DEL RIO, MERCER, &c. Allegorically; WICKLIFF and MATTHEWS: The synagogue speaks of the Church. COCCEIUS: Solomon the type of Christ; Baalhamon the world, among which Christ has His Church. PISCATOR, &c.: The vineyard, the Church or congregation of the righteous. THEODORET: Men who apply themselves to religion and to Christ According to MAIMONIDES and the RABBINS: The literal Solomon is here meant, and a comparison made between some literal vineyard and the Church of God. DEL RIO: The vineyard the Jewish Church, with which is compared the Gentile Church, composed both of Jews and Gentiles. GILL, DAVIDSON, &c.: Baalhamon the Gentile world M STUART: Jerusalem, or the land of Israel; spoken by the joint Church of Jew and Gentile, or by the little sister. HAHN: The heathen world a vineyard belonging to the king of Israel, in the land of unrest and dispeace. BRIGHTMAN: Christ compares Himself and His vineyard to Solomon and his: Solomon unable to look to his own vineyard, while Christ personally attends to His Church (Matt. xviii. 20; Rev ii. 1).

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